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WISE AND FOOLISH WOMEN

IN THE NOVELS OF ELIZABETH GASKELL

submitted by JANE MARGUERITE DEMPSEY JACQUES

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Sara Stambaugh

Supervisor

Date 4 Dec. 1980

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

WISE AND FOOLISH WOMEN IN THE NOVELS OF ELIZABETH GASKELL

BY

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A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

In the novels and short fiction of Elizabeth Gaskell, the female characters generally assume the task of maintaining the home. Just as Mrs. Gaskell's own home in childhood was unstable, so her fictional families are often on the verge of collapse and survive only through the efforts of the women of the household. As wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters, these women either carry out their natural roles wisely and preserve their fragile home, or else act foolishly and destroy the structure of the family.

According to Mrs. Gaskell, women have three principal tasks to fulfill within the family. First, they are to be the child-raisers. _Ruth_ (1853) best exemplifies her beliefs about motherhood, a state which she, as the devoted mother of four girls, considered the highest calling open to women. Lacking maternal guidance, Ruth falls victim to a seducer and bears his illegitimate child. However, she becomes an exemplary child-raiser with the help of two wise women, Faith Benson and the servant Sally. In contrast to these three women are Mrs. Bellingham and Mrs. Bradshaw in the same novel, who fail to act as moral examples for their sons and thus ruin them for life.

The second responsibility of women is to keep peace

in the home. In Sylvia's Lovers (1863), Sylvia's inability to forgive her husband Philip hastens the collapse of their family. Contrasted with Sylvia are two wise peacemakers, her mother Bell Robson and her neighbour Hester Rose. The examples of these women and of two peacekeeping men persuade Sylvia to forgive Philip before he dies.

Finally, a woman's third task is to nurture her family. In her last and most skilful novel, Wives and Daughters (1865), Mrs. Gaskell contrasts two women who care for others, Molly Gibson and Mrs. Hamley, with two non-nurturers, Cynthia Kirkpatrick and Hyacinth Gibson. The nurturing women suppress their own needs, care for the sick, and perform sundry small deeds for other people. Cynthia and her mother, however, place their own happiness first as they strive toward selfish ends. In Wives and Daughters, Mrs. Gaskell does not insist upon her didactic message but indicates subtly that Molly and Mrs. Hamley earn the love and respect of others while Mrs. Gibson and Cynthia gain worldly success alone.

Mrs. Gaskell's portrayal of women in their three natural roles undergoes a marked progression in her works, shifting from heavy didacticism and melodramatic effects in her early novels to increasing subtlety and individualization of women in the later books. Her growth as an artist may have been hindered by her preoccupation with themes of home and family, in that these concerns kept her from exploring the political, industrial, and historical topics which are often introduced in her novels. Nonetheless, within her sphere as a writer of family life, Mrs. Gaskell emerges as a thorough, competent, and increasingly skilful chronicler of women in their domestic roles, women upon whom the survival of the home depends.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER PAGE

1. INTRODUCTION.................................. 1

2. THE WOMAN AS CHILD-RAISER.................. 12

3. THE WOMAN AS PEACEMAKER.................... 34

4. THE WOMAN AS NURTURER...................... 54

5. CONCLUSION.................................. 86

***

NOTES.. 97

BIBLIOGRAPHY................................... 101

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

All quotations from the fiction of Mrs. Gaskell are taken from *The Works of Mrs. Gaskell in Eight Volumes: The Knutsford Edition*, introd. A.W. Ward (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1906).

MB	*Mary Barton*
Cr	*Cranford*
R	*Ruth*
NS	*North and South*
SL	*Sylvia's Lovers*
WD	*Wives and Daughters*
Letters	*The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell*, ed. J.A.V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966).

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

After the wife of its minister died on November 12, 1865, the congregation of Cross Street Chapel, Manchester, erected a tablet in memory of Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell. The testimonial salutes Mrs. Gaskell's "genius" and "rare graces of mind and heart," but its chief praise is reserved for her domestic role: "She fulfilled the duties of a wife and mother/With a tenderness and fidelity which secured for her/ Undying love."[1] Like the heroines of her five novels, Mrs. Gaskell dedicated herself to her family's welfare and often sacrificed her writing to what she called "a woman's principal work in life,"[2] the task of maintaining the home. Her full-length books, as well as her novelettes and short stories, emphasize the importance of women in preserving domestic harmony and stability. By performing her natural duties of nurturer, child-raiser, and peacemaker, the wise woman in Mrs. Gaskell's fiction keeps her fragile home intact. The foolish woman, on the other hand, neglects or abuses her responsibilities and thereby weakens an already precarious structure. Mrs. Gaskell's own life provided her an ample demonstration of the inherent weakness of the family unit and of the power of women to preserve or destroy the home.

The early years of the writer were characterized by instability. She was born Elizabeth Cleghorn Stevenson on September 29, 1810, in Cheyne Street, Chelsea, London, the eighth child of William Stevenson and Elizabeth Holland and the second to survive infancy. Her mother died when she was thirteen months old, and she was sent to live with her mother's sister, Mrs. Hannah Lumb, at Knutsford. The Lumb household was as disjointed as that of the Stevenson family: Mr. Lumb was confined to a mental asylum, and the couple's only child, a crippled daughter named Mary Anne, died soon after Elizabeth's arrival. Despite the sorrows of her own life, Mrs. Lumb was by all accounts a devoted and loving guardian to her niece, who considered her "my more than mother" and "my best friend."[3] Elizabeth nursed her aunt during the older woman's final illness in 1837 and noted in a letter, "Her faint broken voice is for ever thanking us for our kindness, as if *we* could ever repay her thousand kind thoughts and deeds to us."[4] Mrs. Lumb's example of patience, forbearance, and maternal dedication provided a model for many of the wise women in Elizabeth Gaskell's fiction, such as the invalid Mrs. Buxton in "The Moorland Cottage," (1850), who devotes herself to the care of her niece Erminia.[5]

The Stevenson home offered Mrs. Gaskell further proof of the mutability of home life and the stabilizing potential of a woman's influence. Her father remarried in 1814, but the new Mrs. Stevenson (née Catharine Thomson) apparently made no attempt to reunite Elizabeth or her older brother John in their father's household. Elizabeth's annual pilgrimages to London included only brief sojourns with the Stevensons. As an adult, she admitted to a friend, "Long ago I lived in Chelsea occasionally with my father and stepmother and very very unhappy I used to be" (Letters, 797). Nor did the estrangement between the two households resolve itself with time. John Stevenson, twelve years his sister's senior and a sailor in the Merchant Navy, disappeared en route to India in 1828, and the shock and grief of the loss hastened his father's death. After William Stevenson died in 1829, Elizabeth's visits to Chelsea stopped altogether, and she did not seek out her stepmother or her father's second family for twenty-five years. Too little evidence remains to judge Catharine Stevenson's behavior toward her stepchildren, but the accounts of Elizabeth Gaskell suggest that she used her feminine power to discourage rather than promote family unity. Winifred Gérin remarks, "That Mrs. Stevenson possessed some of the more disagreeable traits characterizing Mrs. Gibson in Wives and Daughters can hardly be doubted."[6] Mrs. Gaskell's early years thus afforded her an intimate view of two contrasting women, the one building a home and the other subverting it.

After her marriage in 1832 to William Gaskell, a Unitarian minister, Elizabeth undertook "a woman's principal work in life" and supported her husband's ministry with her Sunday-school and charity work in Manchester. She suffered the loss of her first child, a stillborn girl, in 1833, but her grief was soon assuaged by the births of Marianne in 1834 and Margaret Emily (Meta) in 1837. Mrs. Gaskell's diary of this period, privately printed by Clement Shorter in 1923, details the joys and anxieties of a conscientious and analytical young mother. A third living daughter, Florence Elizabeth, arrived in 1842, and in 1844 came the Gaskells' only son, William. Tragically, the little boy died of scarlet fever at the age of ten months. Mrs. Gaskell's own health declined after this sudden bereavement, and her husband encouraged her to write to distract herself from her sorrow. She published her first story shortly after the birth of her fourth daughter, Julia Bradford, in 1846.

Mrs. Gaskell's dedication as a wife and mother is evident from a perusal of her letters, edited in a definitive collection in 1966 by J.A.V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard. The letters to her daughters are crammed with domestic details, homely gossip, and maternal solicitude (to eighteen-year-old Marianne, she writes, "Have you got your flannels, as you complain of cold? If not get them *at once*, dear" [*Letters*, 200]). Even her correspondence with her publisher, George Smith, includes frequent allusions to her family's interests and activities. Although no letters to her husband are extant, Mrs. Gaskell voices constant concern for his well-being to her daughters and friends, lamenting his long hours of work and planning surprises for his enjoyment. She had just completed the preparation of her most elaborate surprise, a house purchased at Alton in Hampshire for her husband and unmarried daughters, when she died there suddenly at Sunday tea on November 12, 1865. Her last words were of family matters, and all but Marianne and Mr. Gaskell were with her at the end.

Yet to examine Mrs. Gaskell's home life apart from her life as a writer is to draw a distinction that she herself perceived as invalid. She viewed her fictional and domestic worlds as being inextricably linked, since both were governed by her feminine sympathies with the people in them. To an unknown young woman who sent her a manuscript for evaluation, Mrs. Gaskell replied, "When you are forty, and if you have the gift for being an authoress, you will write ten times as good a novel as you could do now, just because you will have gone through so much more of the interests of a wife and mother" (Letters, 694). Mrs. Gaskell drew upon her own experiences as a wife, mother, sister, and daughter--"a woman's principal work in life"--in formulating the characters in her novels.

Both Mary Barton (1848) and North and South (1855) feature strong-minded young women who fulfill their feminine roles with courage and grace, but these two books focus primarily upon industrial rather than domestic concerns. John McVeagh places these novels under the heading of "social criticism," as opposed to the "stories of country life,"[7] including Ruth (1853), Sylvia's Lovers (1863), and Wives and Daughters (1866). A similar division is made by Edgar Wright, who separates the "Manchester world" of Mary Barton and North and South from the "Cranford world" of Ruth, Sylvia's Lovers, and Wives and Daughters, and concludes that Mrs. Gaskell's "true bent and interests"[8] lay with the latter. In order to examine the family roles of women in Mrs. Gaskell's fiction, this study will focus upon the three domestic country-life novels in preference to the two books which concentrate upon an industrial society. Cranford (1853), which is sometimes considered a sixth novel, is more accurately described as a series of sketches, and thus will not be analyzed to the extent of the other "Cranford world" books. Since many of the women in Ruth, Sylvia's Lovers, and Wives and Daughters have their antecedents in Mrs. Gaskell's short fiction, this paper will also make mention of her novelettes and stories wherever relevant. Her great work of non-fiction, The Life of Charlotte Brontë, is outside the perimeters of this study except insofar as Mrs. Gaskell's treatment of her subject reflects her own beliefs about the domestic roles of women. All quotations from her fiction will be drawn from the only complete collection of her work, the Knutsford edition of 1906. In her short fiction, in her novelettes, and particularly in three of her major works, Mrs. Gaskell demonstrates her conception of appropriate roles and duties for women and portrays the results of compliance with or violation of these standards.

Although many of her fictional women are employed outside the home--Mary Barton as a seamstress, for example, and Ruth as a governess and nurse--their occupations are always subordinate to their primary function as wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters. As Mrs. Gaskell comments in The Life of Charlotte Brontë, a man can change professions

> ...and another merchant, or lawyer, or doctor, steps into his vacant place, and probably does as well as he. But no other can take up the quiet, regular duties of the daughter, the wife, or the mother, as well as she whom God has appointed to fill that particular place... .[9]

These "quiet, regular duties" are nowhere made explicit, but a study of Mrs. Gaskell's characters reveals three essential tasks which fall to the women of the household.

First, the woman is to be the child-raiser. Whether she is the natural mother like Mrs. Holman in "Cousin Phillis" (1864), a foster parent like Susan Palmer in "Lizzie Leigh" (1850), an aunt like the Misses Morton in "Morton Hall" (1853), or a stepmother like Mrs. Gibson in Wives and Daughters, she is to mould the child's moral character and provide ample discipline, security, and love. Ruth's attitude toward her expected child is typical of the child-raisers in Mrs. Gaskell's fiction: she thrills to think of "the tiny darling...whom she would have to cherish and to shelter from the storms of the world" (R, 150). Mrs. Gaskell's Diary displays the seriousness and reverential awe with which she herself regarded the high calling of motherhood. As W.A. Craik comments of Wives and Daughters, "The most vital relationship in the novel--and, Elizabeth Gaskell implies, in life--is that between parent and child."[10] The woman as child-raiser, then, is depicted as possessing tremendous influence over her child, and her wisdom or foolishness in exerting that power determines his course for life. Wright notes that the moral flaws of characters such as Bellingham, Ruth's seducer, are generally traced back to a mother's overindulgence or lack of love.[11] Since Ruth portrays at least five women in the role of child-raiser, that novel will form the nucleus of the discussion of women as child-raisers in Mrs. Gaskell's fiction.

A second major function of a female character is to keep peace within the home. The theme of reconciliation is central to Mrs. Gaskell, as most of her critics indicate, but few note that the peacemaker is almost always a woman. Craik recognizes the divisions within the households of North and South: "Though every family group in the novel is united within itself by mutual affection, every family is at odds with itself."[12] In North and South, it is Margaret Hale who repairs the breaches within her own family and that of the labourer Higgins. Acting out of her love for her siblings, parents, or children, the peace-making woman soothes and comforts the family through small irritations and large disasters alike. Like the young sister Mary in "Bessy's Troubles at Home" (1852), she "always contrives to get people right."[13]

When a woman like Mrs. Gibson in Wives and Daughters provokes her family instead of making peace, the harmony of the home is severely impaired. Sylvia's Lovers best exemplifies the woman as wife, mother, and daughter in her natural role as conciliator, through the characters of Sylvia Robson, her mother Bell, and their neighbour Hester Rose. Since Sylvia's unwillingness to be reconciled to her husband is the pivotal concern of the plot, the discussion of women as peacemakers will focus upon Sylvia's Lovers.

The nurturer is the third dominant figure among Mrs. Gaskell's fictional women. Like the child-raiser, the nurturer provides security and love; like the peacemaker, she preserves the tranquility of the home. However, the nurturer performs these functions primarily by encouraging and supporting the other people in her life. Margaret Hale in North and South, for example, upholds her father's decision to leave his incumbency at Helstone, telling him, "'It is bad to believe you in error. It would be infinitely worse to have known you a hypocrite'" (NS, 62). Her support extends beyond verbal reassurances: she takes upon herself the burden of decisions and planning as they prepare to move to Milton. In the manufacturing town, Margaret's influence over the workman Higgins keeps him from drink and encourages him to settle his labour problems without violence. Similarly, it is Margaret who arranges for the clandestine visit of her brother Frederick, who has been in exile in Spain and is under sentence of death in England for alleged mutiny. After her mother's death, she becomes "as a strong angel of comfort to her father and brother" (NS, 297). The nurturing woman diminishes her own sorrow by active involvement with the cares of others.

Molly Gibson in Wives and Daughters is the culmination of all of Mrs. Gaskell's nurturing heroines. Her quiet, cheerful, steady support of her father, Squire Hamley, Osborne, and Roger is contrasted with her stepmother's deliberate subversion and demoralization of the people in her life. Because of its perceptive characterizations of nurturing and non-nurturing women, Wives and Daughters will be the third novel under intense scrutiny in this study.

Within their appointed roles as wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters, the women in Mrs. Gaskell's works perform three chief functions: they act as child-raisers (best exemplified by Ruth), peacemakers (as in Sylvia's Lovers), and nurturers (displayed in Wives and Daughters). Mrs. Gaskell understood, however, that women accomplish these functions with varying degrees of success. Her lifelong familiarity with Scripture must have included a remembrance of Proverbs 14:1: "Every wise woman buildeth her house; but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands." The novels of Elizabeth Gaskell feature wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters who perform their roles either with wisdom, thereby strengthening their home, or else foolishly, thus weakening the family unit. Wise female characters from Mary Barton to Molly Gibson conscientiously fulfill their domestic duties and, like the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31:10-31, they live to hear their families call them blessed. The foolish women, on the other hand, seek personal rather than domestic gain and conclude by estranging themselves from their homes. In all of her fiction, Mrs. Gaskell emphasizes the power of women for good or ill; the three novels under particular study here will disclose how that power is exercised and misused in the domestic realm.

CHAPTER TWO: THE WOMAN AS CHILD-RAISER

Among prominent Victorian women of letters, Elizabeth Gaskell was virtually unique in being a mother as well as a writer. Contemporaries such as George Eliot, the Brontë sisters, Christina Rossetti, and Harriet Martineau were all childless, as were Jane Welsh Carlyle, Maria Edgeworth, Charlotte Yonge, and Mary Russell Mitford. Of the few women who combined serious literary careers with marriage and motherhood, most seem to have attained distinction either before their children were born or else after their family was grown. Elizabeth Barrett Browning achieved success long before she became a mother, and Frances Trollope's prolific career began when her last child was fourteen. Mrs. Gaskell, on the other hand, established her reputation as a writer when three of her daughters were still in infancy and childhood. Her fiction reveals her intense preoccupation with motherhood and stresses how profound an influence a woman may exert over her children. The wise and foolish child-raisers in Mrs. Gaskell's stories evolved from her own beliefs and experiences concerning mothers and children.

According to Mrs. Gaskell's observations, women "naturally yearn after children" (Letters, 598). She herself found rapturous fulfilment in motherhood ("My girls, my darlings, are such comforts--such happiness!"[Letters, 598]), and, had she lived, she probably would have been disappointed to learn that only Marianne among her daughters ever became the mother of a family. Aina Rubenius notes a recurrent motif in Mrs. Gaskell's early stories: "If a woman had neither husband nor children of her own, she should take care of somebody else's children."[1] Thus Susan Palmer in "Lizzie Leigh" adopts a streetwalker's child and also teaches at a charity school; the three spinster sisters in "Morton Hall" raise their little niece; and Miss Galindo in "My Lady Ludlow" (1858) takes as a ward the illegitimate daughter of a former suitor. Since she herself was raised by an aunt, Mrs. Gaskell recognized that any woman could be guided by her natural instincts to foster a young person's growth. Other circumstances in Mrs. Gaskell's life also influenced her portrayal of fictional child-raisers.

In most of Mrs. Gaskell's stories, the mother's absence emphasizes her significance as a moral force in the home. The majority of her heroines are left motherless at an early age, just as she herself was, and many of these girls suffer for want of the moral and spiritual direction that a mother or her surrogate should provide. Ruth Hilton, for example, "was too young when her mother died to have received any cautions or words of advice respecting _the_ subject of a woman's life" (_R_, 43), namely sexual purity, and as a result she is easily deceived by the wealthy and amoral Bellingham. Another motherless girl, Mary Barton, longs for maternal counsel when she verges on a similarly compromising alliance: "'If mother had but lived, she would have helped me'" (_MB_, 29). Yet a living mother does not necessarily ensure a girl's probity. The older woman must be available to her child and morally upright herself in order to exert a positive influence upon an impressionable daughter. Mrs. Gibson in *Wives and Daughters* is censured for her early estrangement from Cynthia, who confides to her stepsister, "'Somehow, I cannot forgive her for her neglect of me as a child, when I would have clung to her'" (*WD*, 257). In addition, the girl's frivolous and dissembling manners are traced to Mrs. Gibson's influence. As Arthur Pollard points out, "she is her mother's daughter."[2] Disastrous though the early loss of a mother may be in depriving a girl of maternal precept and example, Mrs. Gaskell suggests that the effect of an unsympathetic and guileful woman upon her daughter can be still more undesirable.

Mrs. Gaskell's perception of motherhood may owe some of its intensity to the fact that she lost two of her children: her first daughter was stillborn, and her only son died in infancy. The high rate of child mortality in Victorian England was of constant concern to her, both personally and professionally. Seldom does a mother appear in Mrs. Gaskell's stories without immediate reference to the lost child she cherishes in memory. A typical example is Mrs. Holman in "Cousin Phillis." When she says of her daughter, "'She is our only child--now,'" the narrator concludes, "Either from that 'now,' or from a strange momentary wistfulness in her eyes, I knew that there had been more children, who were now dead."[3] Just as the early loss of her mother and her upbringing by an aunt became recurring motifs in Mrs. Gaskell's treatment of motherhood, so too her grief for baby William and the unnamed first-born was transmuted into a generalized sorrow for all mourning mothers.

Her continual presentation of incomplete families emphasizes Mrs. Gaskell's awareness of the fragility of the home. In the face of high infant mortality and frequent childbed death, motherhood became to her an idealized and coveted estate. Francoise Basch points out that Mrs. Gaskell, like Dickens, tended to indulge in a sentimental adoration of mothers;[4] for example, in Ruth, the heroine is redeemed through love for her son. Mrs. Gaskell cherished her own daughters to the point of worrying lest she idolize them.[5] A similar fear occurs in both Ruth and Sylvia's Lovers, in which the young mothers' attachment to their offspring is passionate and all-consuming. A childless writer like George Eliot could satirize Celia's fascination with "watching the remarkable acts of the baby,"[6] and Trollope, himself a devoted father, could speak lightly of "a regular service of baby worship"[7] conducted by a doting mother and aunt. But Mrs. Gaskell, as a scrupulous and devout mother, warned herself and her readers against making too much of a child for fear its life might be taken in retribution. Ruth exclaims after Leonard's birth:

> "If God will but spare you to me, never mother did more than I will. I have done you a grievous wrong--but, if I may but live, I will spend my life in serving you!"
>
> "And in serving God!" said Miss Benson with tears in her eyes. "You must not make him into an idol or God will, perhaps, punish you through him." (R, 161)

Coming from Miss Benson, a sensible and conscientious woman "with an intuition into the very heart of all things truly religious" (R, 177), the admonition strikes Ruth deeply. Fearful of idolizing Leonard, she prays for forgiveness and discovers that "her love for her child led her up to love for God" (R, 207). Although a child must not be an object of worship, Mrs. Gaskell indicates that a mother's love can point the way to the Divine.

Mrs. Gaskell's idealization of motherhood was tempered, over the years, by her experiences in the home and her sense of humour. In a letter to her sister-in-law Anne Robson in 1851, she describes each of her daughters with a happy blend of objectivity, maternal pride, and exasperation. Marianne, almost seventeen, showed "such a sense of duty," but "looks at nothing from an intellectual point of view, and will never care for reading." Fourteen-year-old Meta was "untidy, dreamy, and absent," yet, according to her mother, "is quite able to appreciate any book I am reading." The third daughter, nine-year-old Flossy, "has no talents under the sun, and is very nervous and anxious," but is praised for her "utter absence of jealousy" toward five-year-old Julia, who is described as "witty, and wild, and clever, and droll, the pet of the house" (Letters, 161). Her correspondence with the girls themselves confirms that Mrs. Gaskell perceived each daughter as an individual, since she wrote to them separately and included personal reminiscences, admonitions, and encouragement. For all her romanticism about motherhood *per se*, for all of the sentimental tears shed over lost infants and dying mothers, there is remarkably little idealization of the relationship between living mothers and daughters in Mrs. Gaskell's books. Rubenius indicates that several of her young women, including Phillis Holman, Sylvia Robson, Jemima Bradshaw, and Cynthia Kirkpatrick, "have no exaggerated love for their mothers,"[8] but instead experience all of the strains and ambiguities common to any family. Mrs. Gaskell must have been too familiar with the tensions between daughters and mothers to idealize that particular relationship.

If her sentiments about children were somewhat modified by the reality of child-raising, it is nonetheless true of Mrs. Gaskell, as Gérin remarks, that "the experience of motherhood...was of the utmost importance in shaping the writer she became."[9] Her depiction of wise and foolish child-raisers stems directly from her own observations and knowledge, always seasoned with genuine sympathy for even the most incompetent parents. In *Ruth*, she examines how an ignorant unwed adolescent mother, given proper training and encouragement, can raise an intelligent and virtuous child. By contrast, the two foolish child-raisers in the novel, who possess social and material advantages and yet lack the moral fibre of Ruth and her friends, bring up sons who are conniving and immoral. Mrs. Gaskell defines in _Ruth_ the essential qualities of wise child-raisers, and through the examples of the Benson, Bellingham, and Bradshaw homes she displays the profound impact of a wise or foolish upbringing upon a malleable child.

Ruth herself is little more than a child when the novel opens, and Mrs. Gaskell carefully traces the girl's character back to the influence of her long-dead mother. Her natural piety arises from "the old holy thoughts which had been her childish meditations at her mother's knee" (_R_, 34), and her meek if overly-passive nature reflects that of her gentle invalid mother (_R_, 36). Raised by this saintly mother in a sheltered home, Ruth is "innocent and snow-pure" (_R_, 43) about the ways of men. Like her mother, Ruth is left orphaned and destitute as a young girl (_R_, 35); however, no respectable farmer claims her as his bride, as her mother was claimed by Mr. Hilton. When Ruth's warm and devoted family becomes only a cherished memory, she naturally seeks its replacement. Her "loving disposition, continually sending forth fibres in search of nutriment" (_R_, 38) leads her to welcome the attentions of Bellingham. She finds her surrogate family not with the wealthy young man, however, who seduces and then rejects her, but with Thurstan and Faith Benson, a Dissenting minister and his sister, who care for her after she has been abandoned. The Benson household, which also includes Sally, the faithful servant, is as closely-knit as Ruth's own family had been. By the time her illegitimate son is born, Ruth is secure enough to shower him with the love that she herself had been seeking. According to Pollard, "Mrs. Gaskell stresses that the mother-child relationship here [in Ruth] is no less, in fact if anything more, intimate than that of married mothers and their offspring."[10]

Ruth's upbringing in a loving home, the example of her own devoted mother, and her natural maternal instincts all permit her to develop as a wise child-raiser for her son. Moreover, the influence in the Benson home of Sally and Faith provides Ruth with models of the intelligence and common sense which she lacks.

Faith and Sally are single women in late middle age who exemplify Mrs. Gaskell's belief that the maternal instinct is latent in every woman. Although both initially react with horror to the prospect of a child in the house--Faith recoiling in moral indignation, and Sally in disgust ("'I never could abide them things'" [R, 137])--the two women fall naturally into the role of child-raiser when little Leonard arrives. Faith's revulsion against the child as "'this badge of her shame'" (R, 118) dissolves instantly when the newborn infant grasps her finger: "That baby-touch called out her love; the doors of her heart were thrown open wide for the little infant to go in and take possession" (R, 160). Sally too succumbs to her maternal nature and offers Ruth the benefit of her advice on child-rearing. Finding the mother weeping on her baby's face one day, Sally indignantly takes the child and informs Ruth that it is bad luck to let tears fall on an unweaned infant. "'But thou'rt not fit to have a babby, and so I've said many a time. I've a great mind to buy thee a doll, and take thy babby mysel' '" (R, 172). The rough-spoken but warm-hearted servant, one of Mrs. Gaskell's triumphs of characterization, has already been depicted as a loving friend to her employers (R, 134) and a faithful guardian to Ruth (R, 144). Although Sally claimed before the birth that she would "'sooner have rats in the house'" (R, 137) than a baby, her natural tenderness makes her one of Leonard's most loyal supporters.

Sally's boast that she could be a "'better mother'" (R, 172) than Ruth reveals the depth of the servant's repressed maternal instinct. However, Mrs. Gaskell indicates that all three women are required for the child's balanced upbringing. Ruth may be the best mother, but Faith and Sally supply what she cannot and take her place when she dies. The three women in combination exhibit all of the qualities of the good child-raiser.

In Mrs. Gaskell's fiction, one of the traits of the successful mother is a reliance on prayer. Ruth's initial reaction to her pregnancy is a pious exclamation ("'Oh, my God, I thank thee!'" [R, 117]), and she never ceases to "strive and pray" (R, 198) for her child. Like Ruth's own mother, "who had made her childhood's home holy ground" (R, 140), the girl beseeches God constantly to spare Leonard to her and to strengthen her for the task of raising him as a Christian. Many of Ruth's prayers and anxieties (for example, her persistent fear for Leonard's health and her concern about idolizing him) are borrowed directly from My Diary, indicating that Mrs. Gaskell perceived prayer as a duty of motherhood for herself as well as for her characters.

Ruth's prayers are never mechanical exercises; Mrs. Gaskell sympathetically describes the girl's struggles and allows her to grow in faith as the novel progresses. Before Leonard's birth, her commitment to God and her "new-born resolutions" (R, 154) for her child are endangered whenever she thinks of Bellingham, whom she still loves. After years of unselfish prayer, however, she is able to reject her seducer's renewed advances in order to "'save Leonard from evil'" (R, 298). Her spiritual development as a mother is convincingly and compassionately portrayed. According to Mrs. Gaskell, the first task of the wise child-raiser is to relinquish her charge to God and to say with Ruth, "as she looked her last on her boy, 'Thy will, not mine, be done'" (R, 207).

If prayer is the first duty incumbent upon a mother or her surrogate, the child's moral instruction is the second. The essential goodness of Ruth's own character is attributed to her mother's gentle precedent and precept, "early teaching of that kind which need never be unlearnt" (R, 185). Ruth, for her part, pours all of her "pious earnestness" (R, 177) into teaching Leonard moral values. Nor is she alone in this task. The child's surrogate mothers, Sally and Faith, conscientiously impart the same high morality through their own example and instruction. At one point, Mrs. Gaskell uses a conflict over moral teaching to dramatize the differing but complementary methods of the three women.

Leonard, aged six, is caught in some innocent falsehoods, and the stern Faith Benson insists that he be whipped. Ruth reluctantly concurs but withdraws to weep and pray rather than witness the administration of the punishment. The third child-raiser, Sally, adamantly opposes the disciplinary measure, indicating that the child's fibs are trivial compared to the adults' lie in passing off Ruth as a widow. For Leonard, however, the moral lesson comes not from the proposed whipping, nor from Sally's intervention, but from seeing his mother "kneeling and sobbing" (R, 203). The sight moves him to exclaim, "'Mamma! mamma! I will be good--I make a promise; I will speak true--I make a promise!'" (R, 203).

Mrs. Gaskell's practical wisdom as a mother induces her to explain that Leonard's faults owe more to his stage of development than to any latent depravity, and that the adults of the household, unaccustomed to children and loving Leonard intensely, tend to exaggerate his misdeeds rather than risk spoiling him. As good child-raisers, the three women strive earnestly to inculcate sound moral values in the boy, even though their methods may at times suggest naïveté and ignorance.

Ethical instruction, however, is only one branch of the teaching that good child-raisers undertake. Mrs. Gaskell was herself the product of an exceptionally competent girls' school, and she provided her daughters with the best formal education and extra-curricular classes that the family could afford (her daughter Meta, for example, studied art under Ruskin). For the most part, wise parents in her fiction take pains to secure first-rate teaching for their children. This education naturally varies according to the circumstances of the family. In Sylvia's Lovers, Sylvia's mother Bell Robson has "a great respect for the learning she had never acquired" (SL, 98) and so engages Philip Hepburn to teach Sylvia her letters. The stubborn girl refuses to learn for many years, until the desire to read her Bible and teach her own child prompts her to return to her books. In "The Crooked Branch" (1859), Benjamin Huntroyd's downfall begins with his education, but Mrs. Gaskell notes quickly that the type rather than the fact of schooling is at fault: "He had been sent to a day-school in the neighbouring town--a grammar-school in the high state of neglect in which the majority of such schools were thirty years ago."[11] Furthermore, Benjamin receives this inadequate teaching because his foolishly doting parents cannot bear to send him away to boarding school. Sylvia's ignorance stems from her father's refusal to send her to school, and Benjamin's character is ruined by his parents' choice of instruction for him. The child-raiser is responsible for practical as well as moral education, as Ruth also confirms.

Ruth and Faith share the burden of Leonard's education and, again, their complementary personalities provide the balance necessary to a successful child-raiser. Sensible of her own meagre learning, Ruth rises early each morning "to acquire the knowledge hereafter to be given to her child" (R, 176). She studies faithfully and earnestly, even learning Latin in order to teach it, and Mrs. Gaskell stresses her patience, humility, and gentleness as a tutor. Miss Benson, on the other hand, prides herself on being a disciplinarian (R, 431). With her own Sunday class of schoolgirls, she "was far more particular in keeping them to their reading and spelling than her brother was with his boys" (R, 150). Although she is never pictured as teaching Leonard directly, a task reserved for Ruth and Mr. Benson, she frequently appears on the fringe of the schoolroom offering advice ~~and~~ aid. It is Faith who "read several books on education, knitting socks for Leonard all the while" (R, 203); it is Faith who worries about the boy missing his lessons during a proposed holiday (R, 431). Predictably, Faith also supports the surgeon's offer to take Leonard as an apprentice (R, 434). Her practicality and common sense serve as a foil for Ruth's loving dedication and devotion. Together the women display the traits required of a child-raiser who would educate her charge wisely and well.

The qualities pertaining to a good child-raiser, according to Mrs. Gaskell's standards, are shared by the three women in the Benson household. First, a mother-figure must be in constant prayer for her charge, as are Ruth and Faith. Out of prayer proceeds a concern for the child's moral upbringing, and Sally, Faith, and Ruth all take an active part in shaping Leonard's character. Finally, the wise parent or her surrogate makes intelligent choices about the child's education, just as Faith and Ruth devote themselves to teaching Leonard.

In addition to these responsibilities, the good child-raiser sets a consistent personal example of integrity, discipline, patience, and diligent labour. Leonard rejects his mother after learning of his illegitimacy, but she places her example before him: "'When he sees me really striving hard and longing to do what is right, he must love me'" (R, 362). Mrs. Gaskell may overemphasize Leonard's passionate response to his illegitimacy, considering that the boy is only eight years old and has led a wholly sheltered life. It is difficult to imagine, in fact, what meaning Ruth's confession could hold for him at his age. More convincing is Ruth's reaction to her son's "ungracious and sullen ways" (R, 363). Although agonized by his rebuffs, "she believed and knew that he was yet her own affectionate boy, although he might be gloomily silent, or apparently hard and cold" (R, 363). With psychological accuracy, Ruth recognizes that "'it is only I who can reinstate myself in his love and respect'" (R, 362). She wins him over completely after she volunteers as a fever-nurse and earns the regard of the entire town. The noble example of a wise child-raiser like Ruth is more influential upon the child than scores of sanctimonious precepts would be.

Just as a mother's loving care and example are forces for good even when she is absent, so too her poor judgment, ill temper, or lax moral standards continue to affect her child long after her direct influence upon him has ceased. Mrs. Gaskell points at the Bensons' mother as the source of Faith and Thurstan's goodness: "the gentle mother, from whom Thurstan Benson derived so much of his character" (R, 134). At the same time, she traces less estimable figures back to their childhood and indicates how a faulty or inadequate upbringing contributed to their character flaws. Foolish child-raisers like Mrs. Bellingham and Mrs. Bradshaw mar their children for life by failing in their appointed duties.

Mrs. Bellingham appears only briefly in *Ruth*, yet her influence is at the very core of the novel. The mother of Ruth's betrayer, she is a power-loving and manipulative woman who still wields control over her grown son. Her influence over him ("and nothing delighted her more than to exercise it" [R, 32]) is both financial and emotional, and Bellingham views her "as a person whose opinion was to be regarded more than that of any other individual" (R, 79). It is no wonder, then, that she easily persuades him to send Ruth away without so much as a farewell. Money is at the heart of her value system: she rewards or punishes her son with her income (R, 51) and believes that her responsibilities toward Ruth can be discharged with a fifty-pound note. Naturally, her son adopts her mode of operations toward others. He tries to regain the affections of the adult Ruth with blandishments, threats, and promises of money, attempting to control her just as his mother controlled him, and he is amazed when the technique fails to pierce Ruth's self-respect. Later, when Ruth is dead, he tries to ease his guilt by offering a sovereign to Sally and money for Leonard's education to Mr. Benson. But just as Ruth returned his mother's fifty pounds, Ruth's friends indignantly reject Bellingham's attempt at financial manipulation. Like the mother, the son seeks power rather than love.

Bellingham's moral limitations do not result solely from his mother's manipulative quest for power. As Mrs. Gaskell points out, his supreme selfishness is a reflection of a corresponding aspect of the older woman's character: he exhibits a "regardlessness which she had taught him (by example, perhaps, more than by precept) of the feelings of others" (R, 32). Whereas Ruth's example teaches her son patient humility, Mrs. Bellingham conveys by her actions a pride and thoughtlessness which her son copies. The foolish child-raiser fails to impart sound ethics to her charge because she herself is essentially unprincipled.

It is interesting to note that Bellingham, like Leonard, is an only child, and like Leonard was subject to "the unevenness of discipline...; the thwarting, resulting from over-anxiety; the indiscreet indulgence, arising from a love centred all in one object" (R, 31). All of these impediments to a healthy upbringing are shared by father and son, yet Leonard flourishes and Bellingham becomes despicable. The difference between the two is in the quality of mothering that each only son receives. For all their errors in judgment and their overcompensatory discipline, Ruth, Faith, and Sally love Leonard sincerely and present to him a daily example of consistent Christian living. The child's welfare is their primary concern in all they do. Mrs. Bellingham, however, motivated by her "wayward disposition and her love of power" (R, 31), makes the same errors without balancing them with love, prayer, and personal integrity. The wise child-raisers undertake their duties out of genuine interest in the child, whereas the foolish pursue them from other, less altruistic motives.

Mrs. Bradshaw, the wife of Mr. Benson's chief pew-holder, for example, loves her children and provides them with an outwardly appropriate secular and religious education. However, she fails in her responsibilities toward her son Richard because she is more concerned with her husband's approval than with the boy's ethical development. When the children misbehave, Mr. Bradshaw blames his wife; thus, she conceals their offenses to avoid his censure. Richard's moral failings are conveniently overlooked: "Her son was her especial darling, because he very seldom brought her into any scrapes with his father" (R, 230). Camouflaging his errors requires guile on her part, which spoils her as a model for her children. All too aware of her duplicity, they imitate her actions rather than her pious speech. For example, Richard admits privately to his sister Jemima that he has attended plays in London, then later publicly echoes his father's condemnation of the amusement (R, 212). The incident recalls his mother's deceptions and foreshadows his own attempted forgery.

With a subtlety sometimes lacking in her portraits of more admirable characters, Mrs. Gaskell describes Mrs. Bradshaw as an affectionate, conscientious mother who nonetheless fails her son by circumventing the truth and encouraging the boy's deceits. When Mr. Bradshaw disowns Richard after his forgeries are revealed, Mrs. Bradshaw loyally stands by her son. Unfortunately, her chance to be a positive moral example to him has passed. Like Mrs. Bellingham, she has used her son for her own ends rather than employing prayer and teaching to develop his best nature.

Mrs. Bellingham and Mrs. Bradshaw are typical among Mrs. Gaskell's women as mothers whose overindulgence, inconsistency, or ethical equivocation spoil the character of their child. The most extensive illustration of such a woman is found in Wives and Daughters, in the person of Hyacinth Clare Kirkpatrick Gibson. Mrs. Gibson views her daughter more as an impediment to the elegant life she desires than as a separate, complex person. Cynthia has been raised away from her mother, for the most part, and no love is lost between them when they are finally reunited. "'I don't think love for one's mother quite comes by nature,'" Cynthia confesses to her step-sister Molly (WD, 252). This selfish, shallow mother who takes an interest in her daughter only when it suits her purpose, is the antithesis of all the qualities that Mrs. Gaskell envisioned for the wise child-raiser. Instead of being guided by religious principles, she is led by self-interest; rather than teaching Cynthia ethics, she imparts practices of deception. In one telling scene, Mrs. Gibson persuades Lady Harriet to stay to lunch, assuring her that the meal will be "very simple" and no more than the family would have eaten had she not stayed. As soon as Lady Harriet consents, Mrs. Gibson signals Cynthia to "'put out the best service, and arrange some flowers, and ask cook what there is for dinner that she could send us for lunch, and make it all look pretty, and impromptu, and natural'" (WD, 414). Her interest in her daughter's education has been slight ("'I hardly ever heard from her when I was at school'"[WD, 257]), and her behaviour seldom serves as a useful example.

Although Cynthia recognizes her hypocrisy and is "always ready with her mockery to exaggerate any pretension of her mother's" (WD, 272), she also imitates Mrs. Gibson to a large extent. The girl's affair with Mr. Preston is riddled with the duplicity that characterizes her mother. For example, she sends innocent Molly to retrieve her letters while intimating to Preston that she herself will meet him (WD, 557). Cynthia has been spoiled by her upbringing, but unlike Henry Bellingham or Richard Bradshaw, she is not irredeemable on that account. Instead, as Pollard notes, Mrs. Gaskell "insists upon the contrast between Cynthia's sincerity (if not profundity) of feeling and her mother's affectation and superficiality."[12] Cynthia endured much as a child because of her mother's indifference, but there are indications in Wives and Daughters that Mrs. Gibson suffers more now from Cynthia's "Lilliputian darts" (WD, 414) of sarcasm and unkindness: "Molly was almost sorry for Mrs. Gibson, who seemed so unable to gain influence over her child" (WD, 414). By seeking her own ends instead of the child's best interests, the poor child-raiser concludes by making her own life miserable.

While characters like Hyacinth Gibson and Mrs. Bellingham are portrayed as unsuitable mothers, Mrs. Gaskell does not contend that some women are naturally unfit for the role of child-raiser. Her first published story, "Libbie Marsh's Three Eras" (1847), describes in part the transformation of a quarrelsome widow into a gentle mother and friend, "touched and softened by the two purifying angels, Sorrow and Love."[13] Similarly, the bitter Nest Gwynn of "The Well of Pen-Morfa" (1850), who was jilted by her lover after she was accidentally crippled, seems at first an unlikely mother-figure. Impervious to her own mother's tenderness and to the affections of the neighbours' children ("'I shall never have a child to lie in my breast and call me mother!'"),[14] she nonetheless finds emotional healing when she assumes the care of an idiot woman. Her mothering instincts are poured out upon half-witted Mary, whom she feeds, shelters, loves, and teaches to pray.

Although "The Well of Pen-Morfa" is overly sentimental and poorly constructed, the tale reiterates several of Mrs. Gaskell's key beliefs about women as child-raisers. First, the mothering instinct is inherent in every woman, whether or not she is a biological parent. Lacking children of her own, a woman can find fulfilment by fostering the growth of a relative, an orphan, or, in this case, a childlike adult. Second, motherhood is in itself a glorious state, capable of altering the woman's nature (as in "Libbie Marsh" and "The Well of Pen-Morfa"), delivering her from perdition (as demonstrated in "Lizzie Leigh"), or even restoring her innocence and purity (as shown in Ruth). Finally, a woman has a powerful and far-reaching influence as a child-raiser: an impact for good, if she performs her duties conscientiously, or for evil, if she neglects or abuses her sacred charge. Nest Gwynn's influence upon the half-wit is evidently salubrious, as the final words of the story attest. After Nest dies, Mary is placed in a workhouse where she struggles to contain her fits of violence and asks the matron regularly, "'Mary has tried to be good. Will God let her go to Nest now?'"[15]

For the wise child-raiser, such evidence of moral advancement is all the reward she seeks. Through prayer, ethical instruction, careful teaching, and, above all, personal example, good child-raisers like Ruth, Sally, and Faith bring up children who do credit to their family. Their success is highlighted by contrast with inferior child-raisers like Mrs. Bellingham and Mrs. Bradshaw, whose children reflect the inadequate upbringing they have received. Despite the potentially devastating effect of poor mothering upon a child, Mrs. Gaskell insists that every woman can and should exercise her natural abilities as a child-raiser, since the role develops her capacity for altruistic love. As a mother, Mrs. Gaskell had ample opportunity for testing her theories about good child-raisers; as a writer, she portrayed women such as those in Ruth who apply the theories and thus raise honest, God-fearing children.

CHAPTER THREE: THE WOMAN AS PEACEMAKER

"We are in the middle of a pretty little family "tiff'," Mrs. Gaskell reported to her publisher, George Smith, in 1864, "which will, I suppose, die out in time, but is unpleasant in the interval" (Letters, 737). This particular dispute, which concerned Marianne's prolonged engagement to her cousin Thurstan Holland, was only one of the many disagreements, misunderstandings, and quarrels that erupted in the Gaskell home over the years as a predictable consequence of close family life. Mrs. Gaskell's letters reveal that she seldom allowed these controversies to "die out in time"; on the contrary, she actively employed her talents as a peacemaker to effect a speedy reconciliation whenever possible. Because she perceived peacekeeping as one of the natural duties of wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters, she strove to maintain harmony in the home and taught her girls to do the same. Her books as well as her letters emphasize peacemaking as a feminine responsibility and portray women who preserve the family structure by practising conciliation. As Rubenius says, "Mrs. Gaskell valued family unity and family affection above most other things."[1]

Several of Mrs. Gaskell's letters describe specific examples of her peacemaking techniques and outline her philosophy about this womanly duty. A note to her eldest daughter, written in 1857, discusses a quarrel between Marianne and the second daughter, Meta. Apparently the argument could have been averted had the girls suppressed their complaints, but Mrs. Gaskell assures Marianne that "it is best to speak about such things in the beginning to the people themselves." She praises Marianne for the "right and holy spirit" in which she has accepted Meta's criticism and advises her to try to appear agreeable in spite of the friction between them: "So many of the 'coolnesses' of life...originate in manner that it is well to be on one's guard as to what gives pain and what does not." This portion of the letter concludes with the heartfelt plea of a mother who had been seeking peace among her children for years: "I could not bear my life if you and Meta did not love each other most dearly...and it is so dreary to see sisters grow old (as one sometimes does) not caring for each other and forgetting all early home-times" (Letters, 434-35).

A more serious quarrel threatened family harmony when Marianne was drawn toward Roman Catholicism during a holiday in Rome. Upon first receiving hints of Marianne's new leanings, her mother "was anxious to keep it from Mr. Gaskell" (Letters, 687) in hopes that the rumours were unfounded. However, when she learned from Roman friends that Marianne had fallen under the spell of Cardinal Manning, she dashed off an angry letter to her daughter--a letter which, to her relief, was never sent. The letter that did reach Marianne is filled with self-recrimination ("Oh! I am so sorry I ever let you go to Rome") and anxious hopes that "you are pretty strong, that you are not led off by excitement...and that you are avoiding temptation." Repressing her own abhorrence of papistry, Mrs. Gaskell wrote calmly and encouraged her daughter to "tell me the truth" (Letters, 921). The note suggests that Mrs. Gaskell, though grieved by the girl's infidelity, was determined to keep peace with Marianne.

Her letter to W.W. Story, the Roman friend through whom Marianne met the Cardinal, is likewise conciliatory in tone. Apparently an earlier letter from Mrs. Gaskell suggested that she blamed Story and his wife for the affair, and he took offense at this implication, because she apologizes in the next letter for the misunderstanding: "I think you are misjudging me a little, dear Mr. Story; but I don't mind--for I can love you all the same; I think you have been a true kind friend" (Letters, 687). With this "temporary quarrel soon healed,"[2] as Gérin notes, she went on to confide in the couple her fears for Marianne's faith and character: "Marianne has all her life been influenced by people out of her own family--and seldom by the members of it, in anything like the same degree, in all matters of opinion" (Letters, 687). This confidence reveals that Mrs. Gaskell was willing to forgive the Storys for their part in the crisis and treat them once more as intimates.

The episode displays Mrs. Gaskell as a peacemaker with her husband, her daughter, and her friends. In the case of her husband, she sought to keep the home quiet by concealing the news until she was convinced of its accuracy, since she shrank from distressing Mr. Gaskell with false reports. With Marianne she urged frankness and assured the girl of her unchanged love, and to the Storys she voiced regret over any misunderstanding and made confidantes of the couple. As a result of her peacemaking efforts, Mr. Gaskell was quickly reconciled to his daughter, the Storys remained close family friends, and Marianne was eventually persuaded to rejoin the Unitarian fold. A foolish peacemaker like Mrs. Hale in North and South would have handled the crisis with less sensitivity ("'What does he mean by having doubts? Surely he does not mean that he thinks differently--that he knows better than the Church?'" [NS, 49]) and might have achieved a very different end.

Mrs. Gaskell expressed her desire for family harmony through her fictional people as well as in real-life situations. Typical among her characters are the sisters and brothers who, despite family tensions, remain devoted to one another for life. The Misses Jenkyns and the Misses Brown of Cranford, the Misses Browning of Wives and Daughters, Faith and Thurstan Benson in Ruth, and the Misses Sidebotham in "Morton Hall" are bound together by family ties and mutual affection which overcome their differences in temperament and purpose. Although usually secondary to the plot, these characters serve to demonstrate peacemaking behaviour that may be thematically important. For example, in Wives and Daughters, the Miss Brownings provide a contrast with Molly and her stepsister Cynthia in their manner of resolving conflict. Whereas Cynthia, like her mother, thrives on innuendo and intrigue, the more mature Browning sisters discuss their complaints openly and then make peace. As Miss Browning tells her sister, "'Phoebe, I'm really sorry I boxed your ears; only I should do it again, if you said the same things'" (WD, 594).

The role of peacemaker is also adopted by Mrs. Gaskell's heroines. As the only surviving child of the household, the typical Gaskellian heroine must keep peace between her parents and forgive them promptly for their injustices to her. Mary Barton, for example, though "ready to leave home forever" (MB, 133) when her father strikes her, is immediately reconciled to him when he seeks her forgiveness. Similarly, Margaret Hale in North and South forgives her father for his perplexing change of faith and strives to reconcile her mother to his decision. For these girls, whose security is constantly threatened by illness, poverty, and death, a stable home life is essential to their sanity. The role of the peacemaker takes on special significance for Mrs. Gaskell's female characters, for whom the family is a fragile and uncertain structure. Without their peacekeeping efforts, its collapse would be inevitable.

Edgar Wright notes that the families in Mrs. Gaskell's fiction repeat the pattern of her childhood: "Hers is the very minimal family unit and subject to calamity, it is the family on the verge of dissolution."[3] Although her childhood and married life were relatively secure, she appears to have been strongly influenced by the instability of the Stevenson home, of which she was only a nominal member. Thus the typical family in her works consists of a widowed parent and an only child, both of whom labour to keep peace and preserve the home. Peacemaking becomes essential to survival in Mrs. Gaskell's world. The reconciliation motif may be overdone in the early books, as Annette B. Hopkins suggests,[4] but Mrs. Gaskell's treatment of the theme increases in skill and depth as her work progresses.

In Mary Barton, for example, the peacemaking episodes are presented as highly-coloured melodrama. When John Barton destroys the tranquility of the home by committing murder, Mary is reconciled to him the instant they meet: "He was her father! her own dear father! and in his sufferings, whatever their cause, more dearly loved than ever before" (MB, 411). In a similar vein, the girl makes her peace with Jem, her rejected suitor, while she is on the stand testifying at his murder trial: "'I loved James Wilson...above what tongue can tell--above all else on earth put together; and I love him now better than ever, though he has never known a word of it till this minute'" (MB, 377). Mary is not the only character in the novel depicted as a dramatic peacemaker. Near the end, the father of the murdered man is reconciled to John Barton the killer, in a deathbed scene that reveals the writer's inexperience and taste for the sensational.

These early portrayals of peacemaking are significantly less successful than those in the later books. Mrs. Gaskell's control improved markedly once she relinquished her sensationalism--what George Eliot called her "love of sharp contrasts"--for the "subdued colours, the half-tones of real life."[5] Sylvia's reconciliation to her father in Sylvia's Lovers, for example, is far more natural and unaffected than Mary Barton's protestations of loyalty: "'Oh, feyther! feyther!' was all Sylvia could say" (SL, 297).

Mrs. Gaskell's finest description of peacemaking comes in her last and most subtle novel, Wives and Daughters. A natural peacemaker like Mrs. Hamley, to whom the Squire often came "to be smoothed down and put right" (WD, 284) is delicately contrasted with Mrs. Gibson, who covets peace out of selfishness and has no conception of "smoothing down" other people. After her insensitivity has irritated her stepdaughter to tears, she declares, "'What can I do to please you, Molly? I, who delight in nothing more than peace in a family, to see you sitting there with despair upon your face!'" (WD, 216). Unlike wise peacemakers such as Mrs. Hamley and Margaret Hale, Mrs. Gibson is interested only in personal comfort, not in the security and tranquility of her family. Patricia Meyer Spacks comments that Mrs. Gibson's "empathetic capacities, if ever she had any, have atrophied; she can now feel only for herself."[6] Since empathy is the very essence of conciliation, the doctor's wife proves to be a failure as a peacemaker who alienates her husband, her daughter, and Molly.

The peacekeeping woman, then, undertakes her role out of love for her family and from a profound need to keep her unstable home intact. This role devolves to the wife, mother, sister, or daughter because she is the one most vitally affected by the continuation or dissolution of the home. A male character like Jem Wilson in Mary Barton, for example, although distressed by the loss of his father and brothers, continues to work and support his mother as before. In like manner, the orphaned Philip Hepburn of Sylvia's Lovers is little affected by his solitary state, except insofar as it frees him to devote his time to the Robsons. Female characters in parallel situations, however, suffer keenly when their home is destroyed. Ruth's downfall begins when she is thrown friendless upon the world after her parents' death, and Margaret Hale and Mary Barton would be equally adrift without their male protectors. Whereas the man of the family has economic power that frees him from the home, the woman's primary vocation in nineteenth-century literature is her home and family. Her social, emotional, and financial needs are met primarily within this sphere, and its loss is inevitably traumatic to her. To forestall the collapse of the home, the woman of the household must keep peace among its members.

Among Mrs. Gaskell's heroines, Sylvia Robson of

Sylvia's Lovers is one who neglects this precept and suffers the consequences. Although she has the potential to be a natural peacemaker, she becomes embittered by life and fails to perform her duties, and her failure only increases her own misery and loss. Sylvia relearns conciliation from the examples of two women and two men, just in time for her to make peace with her husband Philip on his deathbed. This final reconciliation comes tragically too late to bring any happiness to either Sylvia or Philip, however. As Pollard comments, "everything happens too late in this novel."[7] Sylvia's re-education in peacekeeping comes only after the peace of her home has been destroyed.

At the start of Sylvia's Lovers, Sylvia's character is described as being "as undeveloped as a child's" (SL, 26). Wilful and heedless, she provokes her cousin Philip at one moment and makes peace with her father at the next, all depending upon her passing whim. In the shop where her cousin works, she deliberately chooses brilliant red duffle for her new cloak in preference to the sober grey that Philip urges, both from personal desire and because "she would not have yielded to Philip in anything that she could help" (SL, 28). Later, at home, the girl makes peace when Philip unwittingly offends her father: "Sylvia did not care for her cousin, but hated the discomfort of having her father displeased" (SL, 41). In both instances, Sylvia's wise and foolish actions are motivated solely by selfish considerations.

Sylvia's personality, however, is not static, as her peacemaking behaviour affirms. Some of her childish waywardness is checked by the death of the sailor Darley and her first glimpse of the wounded Kinraid. "How people could ever be merry again after they had been at a funeral, she could not imagine" (SL, 80). In this frame of mind, she repents of a passing cruelty to Philip, aware "that she should not like to die that night without making friends" (SL, 82). Her efforts at peacekeeping are now prompted by the fear of mortality rather than by whim. Sylvia continues to affront Philip in word and deed, but now she is quick to retract her speeches when she observes their effect. After scorning her cousin's teaching, she recognizes the "marks of stern offense upon his countenance" and "an air of wistful regret and sadness" about him that prompts her to exclaim,

> "Yo're niver angry with me, Philip? Sooner than vex yo', I'll try and learn. Only, I'm just stupid; and it mun be such a trouble to you" (SL, 119).

Sylvia's consciousness of death cannot last, but she does mature enough during this time to seek peace even when she is not at fault. At the New Year's Eve party at Corney's farm, Philip's jealousy of Kinraid irritates and yet unnerves the innocent girl. Her enjoyment of a shared dinner with the sailor is disturbed by the sight of "Philip's face of extreme displeasure" (SL, 159), and she hurries to go home with her cousin because "somehow she felt the need of pacifying Philip" (SL, 160). Two months earlier, she made peace with him only to keep her father in temper; now she does so from an inner need for harmony. Sylvia's growth as a peacemaker is augmented by her observations of her mother, Bell Robson, and the shop assistant, Hester Rose.

In contrast to her quarrelsome husband, Mrs. Robson is depicted from the start of the novel as a tranquil and uncontentious woman. Daniel Robson is unreasonable and irascible in equal measure, and Mrs. Gaskell notes that a less patient wife could have found fault with him a dozen times a day. For example, when Sylvia arrives home late after buying cloth for her cloak, Daniel spots her at a distance and tells his wife, "'I'll tak' thee a bet it's Philip Hepburn's voice, convoying her home, just as I said he would, an hour sin'.'" Mrs. Gaskell remarks dryly, "Bell did not answer, as she might have done, that this probability of Philip's bringing Sylvia home had been her own suggestion, set aside by her husband as utterly unlikely" (SL, 39). The calm wife sidesteps such pointless arguments without a murmur, for "it was not her way to make replies" (SL, 46). Bell's silences help to keep peace in the Robson home. As she tells her daughter when Daniel's ill-temper becomes especially aggravating, "'Th' feyther's feyther, and we mun respect him" (SL, 48).

Hester's style of peacemaking inclines less toward patient silences than to quiet, well-chosen words. In the shop when Philip and Sylvia dispute over the latter's choice of scarlet duffle, Hester acts as "a reasonable peace-making interpreter" between them (SL, 28). Similarly, she offers mild defense for Sylvia's apparent intimacy with "Newcastle Bess," a disreputable character whom Sylvia greets out of her natural warmth of heart, much to Philip's distaste. Sylvia is grateful for Hester's intervention on both occasions, and when circumstances embitter her against any peacemaking work, the examples of her mother and the shop-woman remain persuasive.

The young girl's burgeoning skills at conciliation are cut short by two tragic events: the sudden disappearance of her lover Kinraid, and the arrest and execution of her father on charges of treason. Mrs. Gaskell capably dramatizes the effect of these losses upon Sylvia by divesting her of her appealing playfulness and substituting a manner of cold reserve. The girl's former high spirits and her present restraint both mask a stubborn and essentially selfish character. Bitterly unrelenting, she insists that she will "'niver forgive'" those who betrayed her father. "'My flesh and blood wasn't made for forgiving and forgetting,'" she declares, rejecting Philip's proposal that she console the dying man who testified against Daniel. "'I should be just a monster, fit to be shown at a fair, if I could forgive him as got feyther hanged'" (SL, 352). In addition, she vows to "'niver forgive'" anyone who links her name with Philip's or implies that she has forgotten Kinraid (*SL*, 325).

Sylvia's new implacability is not restricted to those outside the family. The girl who makes a policy of unforgiveness is equally obstinate toward Philip, whom she eventually marries. Instead of seeking peace and preserving the home, as her mother taught her to do, Sylvia is unrelenting in her relationship with her husband. Misery and hardship have transformed her from a merry, childlike girl who alternately soothed and provoked her cousin into a grave young woman who keeps a pitiless account of wrongs in her heart.

The failure of her marriage may be traced to her stubborn refusal to make peace. When Philip accuses her of still harbouring love for Kinraid, whom she presumes dead ("'and what kind of a woman are yo', to go dreaming of another man i' this way...?'"[*SL*, 374]), she responds with stony silence. At once remorseful, Philip begs for her forgiveness: "it seemed as if he must have her pardon--her relenting--at any price, even if they both died in the act of reconciliation" (*SL*, 375).

This scene is as intense as any in the fiction of Mrs. Gaskell. Stricken with guilt over his angry words and his secret knowledge of Kinraid's disappearance, Philip tries desperately to wring a pardon from his wife. He realizes what Sylvia has forgotten, that forgiveness is imperative if the family is to survive. His wife's bitterness, however, surpasses her need for reconciliation. Although

Philip throws himself beside her bed in an agony of self-reproach, Sylvia lies "speechless and...motionless, the bed trembling under her with the quivering she could not still" (SL, 375). Sylvia withdraws emotionally from her husband, refusing either to forgive him or to fight him. Kinraid's return and the revelation of Philip's guilty knowledge drives the final wedge between them. Again Philip hears Sylvia's obdurate refusal to make peace: "'I'll niver forgive yon man, nor live with him as his wife again'" (SL, 404).

If peacemaking is one of the natural duties of wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters, as Mrs. Gaskell maintains, then Sylvia's failure to perform her role must have its consequences. Predictably, Sylvia's inability to act as a peacemaker brings sorrow upon herself, her husband, and her mother. "'I cannot forgive him; he's just spoilt my life, and I'm not one-and-twenty yet,'" Sylvia tells the herdsman, Kester (SL, 426), yet she begins to realize that she may have spoiled Philip's life as well. Wronged though she was, she was duty-bound as a wife and a Christian to forgive her husband. Her refusal to make peace drives him from his own home, "'poor, and lone, and weary'" (SL, 524), and leaves her miserable and abandoned. In addition, she is torn by the fear that her invalid mother's death was hastened by overhearing the last bitter quarrel between Sylvia and Philip. Three lives, not one, are spoiled by her failure as a peacemaker, and Sylvia relearns the art only with much effort and pain. The examples of four peacemaking men and women prepare her to forgive Philip as he lies dying in her arms.

Just as her mother was Sylvia's example in happy times, so the older woman exemplifies peacemaking behaviour for the younger during their shared sorrow. Pollard notes that, although "Bell Robson has had much to endure in her marriage," she remains quiet and conciliatory toward her husband throughout his arrest and trial. Pollard says, "The final days show how much she cares for her erring husband. There is no word of reproach. The lesson of her faithfulness and forbearance is not wasted when we read of her daughter's troubles in her marriage."[8] Although Sylvia's nature is more akin to her father's than her mother's, she attempts to emulate the old woman's peacemaking when she takes a cup of tea to Philip after she has annoyed him: "'I'll go to him with it, because mother bids me, and it'll ease her mind'" (SL, 387). Yet, as Mrs. Gaskell points out, "If the act itself was conciliatory, the spirit in which she was going to do it was the reverse" (SL, 387). Sylvia can copy her mother's peaceable actions, but she endures much sorrow before she learns to adopt her forgiving spirit.

In addition to her mother's example, Sylvia benefits from the silent teaching of Hester Rose, the young shopwoman whose unrequited love for Philip makes her both love and hate the woman he chose as his bride. Perceiving the unhappiness of the pair, she innocently attempts to make peace between them--a futile effort, as Mrs. Gaskell explains, because Hester fails to understand Sylvia's character. What she admires as "staidness and outward peacefulness" in the formerly vain and wilful girl is actually indifference and "an unnatural restraint" (*SL*, 383), as Philip too well knows. Nonetheless, Hester's anxious attempts to "soothe and make peace" (*SL*, 386) are not lost on Sylvia, who turns to her for comfort when Philip disappears. Hester pleads with her to "'put away the memory of past injury, and forgive it all'" (*SL*, 470) should Philip come back, but Sylvia reaffirms her vow: "'I'd do a deal for yo', I would, but I daren't forgive Philip'" (*SL*, 470). When he returns incognito and Hester discovers his secret, she plots quietly to win over his wife and "to let drop after drop of healing, peace-making words and thoughts fall on Sylvia's obdurate, unforgiving heart" (*SL*, 516). Yet Hester's plan to reunite them is thwarted, and her ultimate success as a peacemaker might be questioned.

Despite Hester's apparent failure, it could be argued that Sylvia's change of heart toward her husband develops through living with the peaceful, forgiving Hester. When Sylvia learns of Hester's hopeless love for Philip, she rouses herself from her own misery to be especially kind to the unhappy young woman, which is Sylvia's first effort at disinterested altruism. Although Sylvia resists Hester's overt peacemaking gestures, she does forgive Philip at the last, as the other woman has long urged her to do. In addition, Hester may succeed as a peacemaker in that she re-establishes the Hepburn household. After Sylvia's death, she raises their daughter and founds an alms-house in memory of Philip. Since one aim of the peacekeeper is to perpetuate the family, Hester's achievement of this end may be seen as a final conciliatory act.

Bell and Hester both provide Sylvia with examples of women in the peacekeeping role. The girl also profits from observing two peacekeeping men, her father and Kester. Because Mrs. Gaskell presents the task of conciliation as a feminine responsibility, the examples of men become especially striking. Daniel Robson is ignorant of household affairs, as Mrs. Gaskell points out (SL, 48), but his peacemaking skill puts his daughter to shame, since that talent is "women's work" as clearly as boiling potatoes or making sausage.

Daniel is by nature an impetuous, quarrelsome old man, little given to introspection and motivated largely by impulse. It is Bell, not Daniel, who is "desirous to bring all present into some kind of harmony" (SL, 290) when an argument erupts around the fireside. Yet Daniel recognizes the importance of reconciliation within an unstable family. When he is led to prison for his part in the press-gang riots, he insists on first making peace with Sylvia for his angry words to her the previous evening: "'Sylvie, my lass, a'm main and sorry a were so short wi' thee last neet; a ax thy pardon, lass, a were cross to thee, and sent thee to thy bed wi' a sore heart. Thou munnot think on it again, but forgie me, now a'm leavin' thee'" (SL, 297).

Although Sylvia later declares, "'It's not in me to forgive'" (SL, 352), there is no question of her refusing her father's request. After Daniel is hanged, his example as a peacemaker almost persuades her to relent when Philip asks her to comfort Simpson, her father's betrayer, in his last illness. She recalls Daniel's "sharp passions, his frequent forgiveness, or rather his forgetfulness that he had ever been injured" (SL, 353). Simpson dies before Sylvia can retract her harsh refusal to forgive, but her memories of her father make her more inclined to future conciliation than Philip understands.

Kester, the herdsman on the Robsons' farm, also displays peacemaking behaviour that affects Sylvia's subsequent actions. After speaking sharply to the girl about her apparent encouragement of Philip's suit during her father's imprisonment, Kester repents and hurries to Sylvia to make peace. "'A'm noane above axing pardon, though a'm fifty and more, and thee's but a silly wench" (SL, 324). Sylvia acquiesces only for the sake of their long friendship: "'If thou wasn't Kester, I'd niver forgive thee'" (SL, 325). This is the first occasion on which Sylvia's relentless cry of "'niver forgive'" is at all modified, and it prefigures her encounter with Philip on his deathbed. Kester's need to be forgiven parallels Sylvia's "'forgive me--me--Philip!'" (SL, 528) in the latter instance. From Kester, Sylvia learns again to forgive and to be forgiven.

The peacemaking skills she relearns with the help of Hester, her mother, her father, and Kester are applied as soon as she is reunited with Philip. Her husband, who lies dying after his heroic rescue of their daughter, calls her to him and they are reconciled in the last hours of his life. As Mrs. Gaskell solemnly avers, "There is a peacemaker whose name is Death" (SL, 516). Sylvia's essentially passionate and impulsive nature permits her to relinquish her vow ("'I'll niver forgive yon man'"[SL, 404]) and to forgive Philip as she is forgiven by him. Projecting her own relentlessness upon God, she asks piteously, "'Will He iver forgive me, think yo'?'" (SL, 524). Tragically, the mutual reconciliation comes too late. Philip dies, to be followed in a few years by his young wife. Sylvia's failure to practise peacemaking contributed to the destruction of her home; now her application of the newly-relearned skills permits her only the briefest restoration of happiness. She learns how to be a wise peacemaker, but not in time to save her family.

The task of keeping peace within the household, as Mrs. Gaskell demonstrates in Sylvia's Lovers, is one of the natural and essential roles of a wife, mother, sister, or daughter. The woman's duties are to forgive and to encourage forgiveness, to seek reconciliation whenever it is required, to smooth over differences between family members, and, if necessary, to conceal or suppress anything that might disturb the harmony of the home. She undertakes this role out of love for the family and concern for its security, since the typical Gaskellian home is too fragile to survive conflict. Bell Robson might be described as the quintessential peacemaker in Mrs. Gaskell's novels, even though her efforts prove insufficient to keep her family intact in the face of brutal external forces. Her daughter Sylvia, on the other hand, is a poor peacemaker whose refusal to forgive is at the heart of her failed marriage and broken home. Her story demonstrates that a woman's neglect of this second vital role can endanger an already-precarious family to the point of collapse. Since the family is a fragile institution at best, according to Mrs. Gaskell, the wise woman must strive to keep its members at peace with one another lest the home be destroyed.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WOMAN AS NURTURER

The lively and voluminous correspondence of Elizabeth Gaskell reveals that, above all else, she was dedicated to the well-being of her family. Although she could expound upon matters of literature, art, religion, and philosophy, such abstractions take in her letters a secondary place to engrossing details of family life: "Julia for four or five mornings past has got up very early to give us our breakfast, and I think this has tired her a little" (Letters, 627); "Meta and Louy are working hard at the dining-room table, mending your pink gown" (Letters, 545). Whether at home in Manchester, visiting in Knutsford or London, or travelling abroad in Heidelberg or Rome, Mrs. Gaskell remained the centre of the household and the final court of appeal on family disputes. It was Mrs. Gaskell who nursed her husband and daughters through their periodic illnesses and depressions; it was Mrs. Gaskell who prepared wardrobes, packed for journeys, and sent notes and letters to family and friends. Her domestic life, as viewed through her collected correspondence, suggests that her chief occupation was that of nurturer: she was happiest when she was taking care of other people.

Throughout her stories and novels, Mrs. Gaskell portrays women who find their deepest satisfaction as wives, sisters, mothers, and daughters in devoting their lives to the service of their family. Wives and Daughters, her last and most sophisticated work, contrasts two women who develop their nurturing skills with two who do not. Although the novel offers no judgment on the latter, Mrs. Gaskell's own character strongly disposed her toward women who, like herself, made a life's vocation of nurturing the people around them.

"When I had *little* children," Mrs. Gaskell told an aspiring young writer, "I do not think I could have written stories, because I should have become too much absorbed in my *fictitious* people to attend to my *real* ones." Her fear of attaining literary renown "by the sacrifice of some duty" (*Letters*, 695) was probably unfounded. Even at the height of her career, when her letters to professional colleagues dwelt upon her "fictitious people," she continued to write to her "real ones" with solicitous messages like, "Go to bed *early*; bread and milk" (*Letters*, 637).

As a conscientious child-raiser, Mrs. Gaskell kept anxious watch over her daughters' health and prescribed home remedies for their frequent headaches, colds, and "utter want of bracing" (*Letters*, 736). As a nurturing woman, her motherly vigilance extended to her husband, other relatives, and numerous friends. Mrs. Gaskell's concern for the well-being of her husband in particular runs like a leitmotif throughout her letters. "Mama says you are to write *by return of post* a long and full account of how Papa is," she charges Marianne (*Letters*, 331). To her cousin Anne Holland she reports of Mr. Gaskell that "for two days I was in great anxiety about him, and even yet he is very weak with this tiresome influenza" (*Letters*, 327).

Added to her perpetual anxiety for his health is her solicitude over his taxing schedule: "he is so overworked" (Letters, 658). Since she herself loved to travel and found change a powerful tonic, she constantly tried to encourage William to holiday away from Manchester. "I wish you could persuade him to go to America with you," she tells an American friend in Venice (Letters, 450). Mrs. Gaskell was convinced that her husband's health and spirits improved as a result of travel, but she noted with despair that it was "almost impossible to push, pull, or stir him from home" (Letters, 758).

Resigned to his sedentary ways, the nurturing Mrs. Gaskell attempted to make their home as inviting as possible for William's sake. She spent the last months of her life buying and furnishing a house in Hampshire, near Alton, "for Mr. Gaskell to retire to and for a home for my unmarried daughters" (Letters, 773). The Alton home was to be kept secret from the minister as long as the details of purchase were still unsettled, because Mrs. Gaskell knew that her husband "does rather hate facing anxiety" (Letters, 760). Her motive in buying the house was to relieve rather than increase his cares, and she anticipated the pleasure of telling him only when the new home was complete.

The nurturant aspect of Mrs. Gaskell's character is evident through the Alton purchase. First, she bought the house at great cost and personal sacrifice expressly for her husband and daughters (for, curiously, as if she sensed her impending death, she seemed to have had no expectation of ever living there herself). Second, she chose the location with the needs of the family in mind. It was within two hours of London, where Mr. Gaskell's sisters and married daughter Florence lived, and it was "in the middle of a pretty rural village, so that it won't be a lonely place for the unmarried daughters who inherit it" (Letters, 775). Finally, she allowed the four girls to help her arrange domestic details, an exercise which they apparently relished, while at the same time she kept the plans secret from her husband, whom she knew would only be distressed by the trouble and anxiety so provoked.

Sadly, the last grand scheme for her family's happiness proved too much for Mrs. Gaskell's health. She died of a massive heart attack while presiding over Sunday tea at the Alton house on November 12, 1865. Mr. Gaskell, who was attending a ministers' conference at Altrincham at the time, learned the secret of the house only when he was informed of his wife's death.

Given her propensity for nurturing other people, it is not surprising that Mrs. Gaskell's last words expressed her concern for another. Judge Crompton, her daughter Florence's father-in-law, had died on October 30, and it had been with difficulty that Mrs. Gaskell had persuaded Florence and her husband Charles Crompton to spend the weekend of November 10 through 12 at Alton. Now, as she was surrounded by her family at an elaborate Sunday tea, Mrs. Gaskell's ready sympathies were drawn toward the Judge's widow. She was in the midst of proposing that Charles bring his mother to Alton for a change of scene when she paused, slipped forward on the sofa, and died.[1]

As a wife and mother, Mrs. Gaskell constantly sought to keep her family happy and well; as a friend, as her letters and her dying words attest, she was unfailingly generous and hospitable. A third aspect of her nurturant personality is revealed by her many small, personal philanthropies. She collaborated with Charles Dickens on a scheme for the emigration of fallen women, a revealing experience for her which led eventually to the writing of _Ruth_ (_Letters_, 98). Her position as the wife of a prominent Unitarian minister gave her responsibility for the poor and ailing at Cross Street Chapel. A typical letter to Marianne asks her "to remind Margaret to order this next Friday pieces of beef for our poor people" (_Letters_, 258). She organized a relief fund for her daughters' former schoolmistress, Rosa Mitchell (_Letters_, 383), and was active in the service of many Manchester charities, including the Duke of Norfolk's Almshouses, the Establishment for Invalid Gentlewomen, and the Deaf and Dumb Asylum (_Letters_, 786; 228; 149). Although she confessed that she was "_not_ a good beggar for subscriptions for anything" (_Letters_, 228), she evidently enjoyed observing the effect of her benevolence upon others. "Thank you for the _great_ pleasure I have had," she concludes a letter to John Foster, who enabled her to perform a charitable deed (Letters, 95). As she revealed to her friend Eliza Fox, it was her nature to be "highly delighted at the delight of everyone else" (Letters, 108).

The loving, generous, nurturing traits of Mrs. Gaskell's personality are evident in her fictional characters, although she herself claimed that "my books are so far better than I am that I often feel ashamed of having written them, and as if I were a hypocrite" (Letters, 228). As she recognized, she "put all [her] goodness" into her novels and stories, so that the most admirable characters display her ready compassion, her willing self-sacrifice, her concern for the sick and poor, and her rich appreciation of others' pleasure. The non-nurturing women in her books are generally described as selfish and immature, like Miss Caroline in "Mr. Harrison's Confessions" (1851).[2] In the early works, the nurturing capacities of most women are taken for granted, and only comic figures like Miss Caroline fail to exhibit any natural desire to care for their families. Even Sally Ledbitter, the vulgar dressmaker in Mary Barton who acts as a go-between for Mary and her wealthy lover, is redeemed by her nurturing ability: "Sally's seed of the future soul was her love for her mother, an aged bedridden woman" (MB, 102). By the time she wrote Wives and Daughters, however, Mrs. Gaskell had attained sufficient skill and complexity in her writing to present both nurturing and non-nurturing women in a credible manner. Her earlier books develop three important traits of the woman as nurturer, traits which she later examines more fully in Wives and Daughters.

As Mrs. Gaskell's letters suggest, one of the primary distinctions of the nurturing woman is her tireless care for the sick. In an era when sanitation was poor, disease ran rampant, and hired nurses were known to be slovenly and profligate, the task of caring for the sick naturally fell to the wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters of the home. To Mrs. Gaskell, a woman's attitude toward this chore indicated her true character. The ladies in Cranford criticize their neighbour Jessie Brown, for example, whose pink bows and prim curls seem incongruous on a woman of thirty. Yet her childish dress is forgiven when she undertakes the care of her dying sister: "'To see her way of bearing with Miss Brown's crossness, and the bright face she puts on after she's been sitting up a whole night and scolded above half of it, is quite beautiful'" (Cr, 17).

Most of the women in Cranford have no relatives and so lack the usual outlet for their sickbed skills. Thus, when a travelling magician is injured in the town, they swarm over him and minister to his needs. Miss Pole finds him lodgings, Miss Matty sends a sedan-chair, Lady Glenmire mixes his medicines, and Mrs. Forrester sends him a mould of the "admirable, digestible, unique bread-jelly" (Cr, 124-25) for which she is renowned. The ladies' instantaneous devotion to the stranger and his family suggests their strong need to take care of others.

Ruth, in the novel of the same name, also expends her nurturing capacities on the sick and dying. When her lover falls ill in Wales, she receives the doctor's instructions and nurses him faithfully, never leaving his room until his mother arrives. Years later, the same dedication is called out when her son sickens. She cares for Leonard in his illness with "almost an animal's jealousy lest any one should come between her and her young" (R, 307). Her commitment to the sick is ultimately her means of redemption, since she erases the stain of Leonard's illegitimacy by serving as a fever-nurse when typhus sweeps the town. Even this sacrifice, however, does not satisfy Mrs. Gaskell's demands upon the nurturing skills of her heroine. She sends Ruth to care for her former lover, Leonard's father, during his bout with fever and allows her to die in the process. Ruth's own needs through all of these incidents are almost entirely suppressed: she cares for others with "an utter forgetfulness of self," "with no thought of greed or gain," and with "every sense...strained in watching" (R, 79; 426; 440).

Unlike Ruth or the Cranford ladies, Sylvia Robson of Sylvia's Lovers does not exert herself to nurture strangers in need. Instead, she focuses her caretaking skills almost exclusively upon her mother. When Bell Robson falls ill of rheumatic fever, Sylvia becomes "entirely absorbed in nursing her," and "no thought of company or gaiety was in Sylvia's mind as long as her mother's illness lasted" (SL, 137). The older woman weakens both physically and mentally after her husband's death, and Sylvia once more devotes herself to her needs. "As her marriage-day drew near, all Sylvia's care seemed to be for her mother" (SL, 335). Coming home from the church on her wedding-day, a celebration cut short by her anxiety for Bell, Sylvia rushes to her sobbing mother and "had neither eyes nor ears for anyone, till her mother was sitting in trembling peace" (SL, 359). Sylvia's single-minded nurturing of her mother is extended after Bell's death to include old Alice Rose, since the girl now "had a stock of patient love ready in her heart for all the aged and infirm that fell in her way" (SL, 446). Mrs. Gaskell carefully points out, however, that Sylvia "never thought of seeking them out, as she knew that Hester did" (SL, 446), a defect that proves fatal to Sylvia's future happiness. When Philip returns to Monkshaven after his self-imposed exile, disfigured beyond recognition and ill and starving, Sylvia deliberately avoids him. Ruth would have nursed him; Hester would have visited him; but Sylvia, mistrustful of strangers and compassionate only to those near at hand, gives him no more than a cake and a half-crown through the medium of her child. Sylvia's care for her mother earns the praises of Philip, Hester, and Alice, but her inability to nurture anyone outside the home contributes to her husband's death.

A second attribute of the nurturing woman is her readiness to express compassion in word and deed. Not only does she care patiently for the sick, she also performs any small act of benevolence or good will that may ease the way of another. The Cranford ladies, for example, are known for their "kindness (somewhat dictatorial) to the poor, and real tender good offices to each other whenever they are in distress" (*Cr*, 1). When Miss Matty loses her life savings in the collapse of her bank, her sisters in Cranford society pledge secretly to provide an annuity for her. Little Mary in "Bessy's Troubles at Home" is of a very different rank and situation than Miss Pole and Mrs. Forrester, but she too has an instinctive perception of kind behaviour. Whereas her sister Bessy attempts to impose her own plans for the evening upon the family, Mary seeks instead to "'try and find out how others think they could be happy, and then help them on with their wishes.'"[3] The Sunday-school story concludes with the moral reflection that Bessy's experiences "taught her several lessons, which it is good for every woman to learn, whether she is called upon as a daughter, sister, wife, or mother to contribute to the happiness of the home."[4]

An effective nurturer, then, seeks to give others pleasure or comfort by doing good works without thought of personal gain. Mrs. Gaskell indicates that a keen intellect is not required for successful nurturing: little Mary is slow at school and considered a dunce. When a woman is clever, however, it is all the more desirable that she turn her sharp mind toward providing for the happiness of her family. In "Cousin Phillis," Phillis Holman is portrayed as an unusually intelligent young woman who nonetheless serves her family and friends with compassionate devotion. Her cousin Paul Manning, the narrator of the story, observes that "she always did right in her parents' eyes, out of her natural simple goodness and wisdom."[5]

Another intelligent heroine, Margaret Hale of North and South, is also a superior nurturer. In pointing out that Margaret is rare among nineteenth-century female characters for having "the capacity for thinking abstractly and disinterestedly about political, social, intellectual, and religious matters," Nancy D. Mann insists that her intellect is essentially impersonal: "It is almost never directed primarily towards the management of human relations, especially domestic relations."[6] Contrary to Mann's assertions, there is strong evidence in the novel of Margaret's highly-developed nurturative powers. For example, she is the bulwark of a weak and indecisive family on at least three occasions: when her father resigns his living and moves to Milton; when her mother is dying; and when her exiled brother returns to England. In the first instance, Mr. Hale is unable to tell his wife of the proposed move and is also incapable of making plans for the journey. Both tasks fall to Margaret. Sensitive and compassionate, she reveals the news to her mother and then stays near her the entire day, "bending her whole soul to sympathize in all the various turns her feelings took" (NS, 51). The girl also arranges the move by herself, recognizing that "if she gave way, who was to act?" (*NS*, 59). Similarly, she insists upon nurturing both parents when her mother falls ill:

> "I am the only child she has--here, I mean. My father is not sufficiently alarmed, I fear; and therefore, if there is any serious apprehension, it must be broken to him gently. I can do this. I can nurse my mother" (*NS*, 147).

Margaret also plans her brother Frederick's clandestine visit during their mother's last illness, and her good management and quick thinking are all that save him from arrest.

Mann suggests that Margaret fails as a nurturer because she is unable to "manage" her parents: Mrs. Hale confides more readily in her servant than in her own daughter, and Mr. Hale persists in his religious doubts despite Margaret's orthodoxy. However, these apparent failures are perhaps more indicative of the weakness of the parents than of the incompetence of the daughter. Margaret's intelligence and skill in "the management...of domestic relations" are never questioned by Mrs. Gaskell. It is Margaret who runs the household, nurses the sick, and gives charity to the poor; it is Margaret who comforts both father and brother when Mrs. Hale dies. As a surrogate daughter to the labourer Higgins, she consoles him on the death of his daughter Bessy, keeps him from drink, and encourages him to come to terms with Thornton, the mill-owner. Although Mann claims that "Margaret Hale...shows no inclination to apply her intelligence in traditionally feminine directions,"[7] she actually excels at the characteristically feminine occupation of compassionate nurturer.

The nurturing woman cares for the sick and expresses sympathy and support in word and deed. Her third identifying trait is her total suppression of personal needs and desires as she attends to the wishes of others. Mrs. Gaskell did not make herself a martyr to her family, but she could recognize and appreciate a self-sacrificing spirit in other women. In a letter to her friend Emily Shaen in 1854, she describes Parthenope Nightengale, the sister of Florence, with a mixture of awe and admiration:

> ...Parthe is plain, clever, and *apparently* nothing out of the common way as to character; but she *is*, for all that. She is devoted--her sense of existence is lost in Florence's. I never saw such adoring love. To set F. at liberty to do her great work, Parthe has annihilated herself, her own tastes, her own wishes in order to take up all the little duties of home, to parents, to poor, to society, to servants--all these small things that fritter away time and life, *all* these Parthe does, for fear if anything was neglected people might blame F. as well as from feeling these duties imperative as if they were grand things (*Letters*, 317).

Mrs. Gaskell's heroines do not extinguish their own natures as Parthenope Nightengale did, but they are expected to suppress their own needs in times of crisis. Mary Barton, for example, bears up through Jem's trial and gives her testimony in spite of fever, fatigue, and "such weary pain in her head," until Will Wilson arrives to corroborate Jem's alibi. Upon sighting Will, Mary shrieks, "O Jem! Jem! You're saved!" and is "instantly seized with convulsions" (MB, 381-82). The ensuing brain fever is Mary's reward for her long days of caring for Jem's mother, searching out the alibi for him, and concealing evidence of her own father's guilt. With similar self-repression, the proud Phillis Morton of "Morton Hall" nearly starves to death rather than admit that her wastrel nephew has squandered her inheritance. When he returns to town, impoverished like herself, she begs from the neighbours only for his sake: "'We are starving for want of food! I can bear it; I don't mind; but he suffers--oh, how he suffers!"[8] Mary's sacrifices for Jem almost kill her, while Phillis' self-denial for her nephew finally leads to her death.

The fullest portrait of a self-abasing nurturer in the stories of Mrs. Gaskell is that of Maggie Browne in "The Moorland Cottage." Neglected and abused by her mother, Maggie submits patiently to her criticisms and serves her spoiled brother with the devotion of a slave. One afternoon when both are still children, for example, Maggie is sewing a long seam outdoors while Edward plays with his boat nearby. Lacking the ballast needed to weight his toy in the pond, Edward instructs his sister to run to the house for some shot.

> "Oh, Ned; I've all this long seam to do. Mama said I must finish it before tea; and that I might play a little if I had it done first,"

> said Maggie rather plaintively; for it was a real pain to her to refuse a request.
>
> "It would not take you five minutes."
>
> Maggie thought a little. The time would only be taken out of her playing, which, after all, did not signify, while Edward was really busy about his ship. She rose... . 9

Mrs. Gaskell clearly does not approve of the demands that Edward and Mrs. Browne place upon Maggie, but she does endorse Maggie's self-denying obedience. The girl's mentor, the invalid Mrs. Buxton, encourages her to lose herself in the service of others and fills her mind with tales of heroic martyrdom. Maggie grows up still seeking the "opportunity for self-sacrifice"[10] that Mrs. Buxton, now dead, has told her will come. It arrives in the form of sacrifice to her brother Edward.

By this time, Maggie is engaged to Mrs. Buxton's son Frank, and Edward has been caught forging cheques in the name of Frank's father. Mr. Buxton, who has discouraged the proposed marriage from the start for reasons of social prestige, offers to drop all charges against Edward if Maggie will renounce her pledge to Frank. Maggie refuses ("'Oh, Maggie! how can you be so hard-hearted and selfish?'" her mother demands), but only for the sake of her betrothed: "'He loves me; it would break his heart.'"[11] However, the girl does consent to accompany her brother to America to help him start a new life. Like the self-denying nurturer that she is, she willingly agrees to forsake her home and leave her fiancé for months or years in order to care for her ungrateful brother. Her "opportunity for self-sacrifice" has finally come. Although the opportunity is short-lived, since a fire aboard ship halts their journey and kills Edward, she continues to practise martyrdom toward her mother. The old woman "prizes her dead son more than a thousand living daughters... . But Maggie treats her with such tender sympathy, never thinking of herself or her own claims, that Frank, Erminia, Mr. Buxton, Nancy, and all, are reverent and sympathizing too."[12]

Maggie Browne may be the most idealized nurturer in Mrs. Gaskell's fiction, but Molly Gibson of Wives and Daughters is surely the most human and sympathetic. The last novel that Mrs. Gaskell wrote examines nurturing and non-nurturing women in their three aspects: care for the sick, compassionate love, and willing self-abnegation. Two nurturing women, Molly and Mrs. Hamley, are contrasted with two non-nurturers, Cynthia Kirkpatrick and Hyacinth Gibson.

It is a mark of Mrs. Gaskell's increased maturity as a writer that she offers no definitive statement about nurturing in Wives and Daughters. There is no simple moral conclusion as in "Bessy's Troubles at Home," no contrived "opportunity for self-sacrifice" as in "The Moorland Cottage," not even a superlatively intelligent and conscientious heroine as in North and South. Instead, Wives and Daughters presents a psychologically penetrating character analysis of four individual women, two of whom accept the traditional female role of caring for other people and two of whom do not. Although her own sensibilities are clearly with the nurturing women, Mrs. Gaskell portrays all four with considerable insight and sympathy.

Like Maggie in "The Moorland Cottage," Molly in Wives and Daughters develops as a nurturer under the tutelage of a gentle invalid neighbour. Mrs. Hamley, the "delicate fine London lady" (WD, 128) who befriends Molly for Mr. Gibson's sake, is less saintly than Mrs. Buxton, and is thus more credible. Confined to her bed by an increasingly debilitating disease, she nonetheless manages to be the very heart of the home: "to find her was to find love and sympathy" (WD, 284). Molly herself experiences the older woman's compassion during her first visit to Hamley Hall. Her father has just announced to her his impending remarriage, and Roger Hamley finds Molly sobbing in the woods. After administering his own rough condolences and bracing advice, Roger takes her to his mother, who he knows "had such sweet power of sympathy that she would draw the sting out of the girl's heart, when she had her alone" (WD. 136). After Mrs. Hamley's death, the Hall grows cheerless and uninviting, because "quiet and passive as Mrs. Hamley had always been in appearance, she was the ruling spirit of the house, as long as she lived" (WD, 284). Her quiet tact, gentle good offices, and peaceful mien leave a strong impression upon Molly, who recalls with the poet Shirley that "'Only the actions of the just/Smell sweet and blossom in the dust'" (WD, 253). To have a sweet nurturing spirit like Mrs. Hamley's, to be as good as her departed friend, "seemed to her to be the only enduring thing in the world" (WD, 253).

Being an invalid herself, Mrs. Hamley is never pictured in the nurturing role of caretaker for the sick. Similarly, her compassionate speeches and deeds are confined by her illness to passive gestures of love within the family. However, she excels in the third aspect of nurturing, that of self-denial. Mrs. Gaskell observes that "possibly Mrs. Hamley would not have sunk into the condition of a chronic invalid, if her husband had cared a little more for her various tastes, or allowed her the companionship of those who did" (WD, 45). Over the years of a basically incompatible marriage, she abandons her literary and social pursuits in order to devote herself to her husband's needs. The result is that she annihilates herself as an individual, both figuratively and literally. Squire Hamley "loved his wife all the more dearly for her sacrifices for him; but, deprived of all her strong interests, she sank into ill-health" (WD, 46). As Patricia Meyer Spacks points out, "Mrs. Hamley perseveres in self-suppression to its natural conclusion in death."[13]

Mrs. Hamley is depicted as a successful nurturer insofar as she denies herself in order to fulfill the emotional needs of her family. However, her death early in the novel cuts short her nurturing role, and her husband and sons are unable or unwilling to take care of one another's deepest needs. As a daughter by proxy, Molly Gibson assumes the position of nurturer at Hamley Hall, a position she has held at home since childhood. Her nurturing abilities surpass even those of Mrs. Hamley, since Molly is in robust health and is able to perform sundry small tasks for every member of the two households. A sympathetic listener, skilful nurse, patient companion, and sensitive friend, she epitomizes the behaviour of the nurturing woman.

Craik's observation that "Hardy's women are ideal mistresses, George Eliot's ideal selves, and Mrs. Gaskell's ideal daughters"[14] is particularly accurate to describe the heroine of Wives and Daughters. Molly Gibson matures through the course of the story, but at every stage of her development she remains a model of filial affection and service. As a twelve-year-old girl, she is accidentally left behind on a visit to the local estate, the Towers, and she suffers there all evening from homesickness and anxiety for her father: "'But papa!' sobbed out Molly. 'He always wants me to make tea for him'" (WD, 18). Years later, learning of her father's intention to remarry, she wonders if her own nurturing of him has been inadequate. Roger suggests that "'this step...may give him a pleasant companion,'" and Molly responds, "'He had me. You don't know what we were to each other--at least, what he was to me'" (WD, 131). Taking Roger's advice to consider her father's happiness ahead of her own, Molly relinquishes her role and attempts to initiate her stepmother into the nurturing process (*WD*, 144). Soon it becomes evident, however, that Mrs. Gibson takes trouble for her husband only when the results are likely to benefit herself. Molly therefore slips back into her old nurturing ways with her father. She sits with him at his late dinners (*WD*, 251), makes his tea once more (*WD*, 199), and plans a comfortable, informal week for the two of them when Cynthia and Mrs. Gibson go to London (*WD*, 507).

Molly's nurturing of her father was apparently intended to continue after her marriage to Roger. Although Mrs. Gaskell died before the novel was complete, the editor of the *Cornhill Magazine*, Frederick Greenwood, wrote an epilogue to conclude the story which had been running in serial form in the magazine since April 1864. Greenwood's remarks, based upon Mrs. Gaskell's own notes and comments, reveal that Mr. Gibson "takes a partner, so as to get a chance of running up to London to stay with Molly for a few days now and then, and 'to get a little rest from Mrs. Gibson'" (*WD*, 757). As Craik observes, "wifehood is the right and desirable evolution from daughtership,"[15] according to the philosophy of *Wives and Daughters*. Molly nurtures her father before and after his remarriage, and there is every indication that she will continue to care both for him and her husband in the future.

Nor is her nurturing skill confined to the immediate family. At Hamley Hall, Molly takes naturally to the role of the dead daughter, Fanny. From her first visit to the Squire and his wife, Molly is "so willing and so wise; ready both to talk and to listen at the right times" (WD, 88). The parents' disappointment over Osborne's failure at college is somewhat alleviated by Molly's compassion; as Mrs. Hamley tells her, "'You give one such pleasant sympathy, both in one's gladness and in one's sorrow'" (WD, 95). A chronic invalid, Mrs. Hamley falls seriously ill after Molly's departure, and the Squire hurries to the Gibson home to fetch her back to the Hall. "'You'll come, won't you, my dear? She's not a poor woman, such as many think it's the only charity to be kind to; but she's just as forlorn of woman's care as if she was poor--worse, I daresay" (WD, 213). Mrs. Gibson's petulance delays the girl's visit for a day, but Molly eventually does go to the Hall and lavishes her "woman's care" upon the dying woman and her family. To Mrs. Hamley she is a confidante and a "soothing comfort" (WD, 226). The Squire finds the girl "a treasure" (WD, 224), and Roger tells her, "You've been like a daughter to my mother" (WD, 232). Even when the older woman sinks into the final stages of her illness, Molly stays on at the Hall, "trying to do all she could out of the sick-room, for the comfort of those in the house " (WD, 235).

After Mrs. Hamley's death, Molly's unescorted visits to the Hamleys cease, since there are no other women in the family. Yet, as Roger tells her, her presence would smooth out the unhappiness between his brother Osborne and the Squire and "'would give my father so much pleasure--he looks upon you as a daughter; and I'm sure both Osborne and I shall always consider you are like a sister to us, after all my mother's love for you, and your tender care of her at the last'" (WD, 283). The Hamleys are thus deprived of Molly's nurturant love until Osborne dies unexpectedly. Molly immediately rides over to the Hall alone, deaf to her stepmother's remonstrances, to offer what help she can to the old Squire. Innately sensitive to his grief, she sits up with him by his dead son and tries to feed him soup, "as if he had been a sick child and she the nurse" (WD, 643). Mrs. Gaskell describes the scene tenderly, evoking the reader's respect for Molly.

Molly's gentle nurturing is needed the next day as well, when she breaks the news of Osborne's secret marriage to the distraught father. At her own father's bidding, Molly writes to the wife, Aimée, to inform her that Osborne is ill, and at the Squire's request, she tells her in person of his death. The girl then remains at the Hall during Aimée's extended illness to assist in nursing and to listen to the Squire's "incontinence of language" (WD, 674) about his sorrow.

Mrs. Gaskell makes the nurturant Molly ideally suited to her task. She is a ready listener ("her sympathy was deep and unfailing" [WD, 675]), an intelligent nurse ("Molly was needed to receive the finer directions as to her treatment and diet" [WD, 674]), and a self-sacrificing worker ("so anxious was she to do all she could for others" [WD, 675]). Molly's own health breaks down during her ordeal to the point that her doctor father worries "that she might become a permanent invalid" (WD, 679). She recovers, but had her father's apprehensions been realized, she would have joined the ranks of Mrs. Hamley and Mrs. Buxton: a delicate, sweetly sympathetic figure languishing on the sofa, murmuring encouragement to her family and suppressing her own needs to the point of death.

Molly's self-denial does not kill her, but it almost destroys her reputation with the inhabitants of Hollingsford. For the sake of her stepsister Cynthia, she compromises herself by meeting Preston, the land agent, in private to ask him to return Cynthia's love letters. Molly and Preston are seen together, and gossip about their engagement flies through the town. Although Molly is offended and mortified by suggestions that she has behaved improperly, her pledge to Cynthia keeps her from revealing the truth. As a compassionate and loyal nurturer, she sacrifices even her good name in order to help her stepsister.

Mrs. Gaskell discloses Cynthia's less sensitive nature through her failure to support Molly during the scandal. As soon as the gossip becomes audible, Cynthia departs for London, feeling all the while guilty and yet relieved to be away from Molly. Grateful though she is to Molly, she also feels somewhat antagonistic toward her:

"the consciousness that the good, straightforward girl had learnt that Cynthia had been guilty of so much underhand work cooled her regard, and restrained her willingness of intercourse" (WD, 586-87). The distinction between Molly as a nurturer and Cynthia as a non-nurturer is made clear through the incident with Preston, in which Molly is eager to help her stepsister and Cynthia callously allows her to compromise herself in the process.

Cynthia is fully aware that her own lack of compassion for others makes her unable to nurture as Molly and Mrs. Hamley can. "'I wish I could love people as you do, Molly!'" she tells her stepsister, adding, "'A good number of people love me, I believe, or at least they think they do; but I never seem to care much for anyone'" (WD, 252). Mrs. Gaskell traces Cynthia's inadequate nurturing ability back to childhood, when she was neglected and shunted off to school by an unsympathetic mother. There are indications as well that Cynthia's character owes as much to heredity as to environment. Even though she and her mother were apart for many years, they share an insensitivity to others. Just as Molly's generous and loving behaviour may be "an hereditary instinct" (WD, 381) acquired from her long-dead mother, so too might Cynthia's cavalier approach to human relations be a legacy from Hyacinth Gibson. When Cynthia does make an effort to nurture others, her motives are generally selfish. Since she loves to be loved, for example, she encourages flattering attentions from Roger, Mr. Cox, and Mr. Henderson. On one occasion only does she exert herself to nurture another without expecting personal gain. When she hears of Molly's prolonged illness, she immediately leaves London and returns to Hollingsford to care for her. Because Molly nurtured her during her personal crisis, Cynthia is able to nurture Molly.

"'The dear creature! Always thinking of others before herself,'" exclaims Mrs. Gibson of her daughter (WD, 754). She fails to recognize what Cynthia herself acknowledges: the girl's nurturing abilities are shallow. As Mrs. Gaskell indicates, however, Hyacinth Gibson herself is a nurturer only in the most superficial sense. Although she pictures herself as a deeply compassionate and tender woman ("'I have always been such a sensitive creature!'" [WD, 569]), her sympathies are in fact all trained upon herself. Her life as a governess has forced her to cultivate a general agreeableness toward all who might benefit her. In her work, she was always "so ready to talk, when a little trickle of conversation was required; so willing to listen, and to listen with tolerable intelligence, if the subjects spoken of did not refer to serious solid literature, or science, or politics, or social economy" (WD, 108). Her apparent nurturing ability is actually a well-developed instinct to please others who can in turn please her. Unlike Molly, who responds to the needs of others out of altruism, Mrs. Gibson first calculates the personal benefits to be reaped from a charitable scheme. Mrs. Gaskell dramatizes this instinct on numerous occasions, such as the following episode near the close of the novel.

At the time of Cynthia's wedding, Molly is not yet well enough to travel to London, and Lady Harriet proposes sending her to the Towers rather than leaving her at home with the servant Maria. Automatically, Mrs. Gibson weighs the plan from her own perspective rather than from Molly's point of view:

> Mrs. Gibson was rapidly balancing advantages and disadvantages. Amongst the latter, jealousy came in predominant. Amongst the former, it would sound well; Maria could then accompany Cynthia and herself as "their maid," Mr. Gibson would stay longer with her, and it was always desirable to have a man at her beck and call in such a place as London... (WD, 711).

She concludes that the proposal will be generally advantageous to her and so acquiesces to Lady Harriet in a manner suggesting that her sole concern is for Molly's welfare: "'What a charming plan! I cannot think of anything kinder or pleasanter for the poor darling!'" (WD, 711).

Throughout the novel, Mrs. Gibson makes a pretense of nurturing other people. Although she insists before her remarriage that Molly tell her all of Mr. Gibson's particular likes and dislikes in housekeeping--"'It will be such a pleasure to me to attend to his slightest fancies'" (WD, 144)--she immediately turns the conversation to her own whims. Discovering that her future husband likes cheese, she assures his daughter, "'Oh! but we will cure him of that. I couldn't bear the smell of cheese; and I'm sure he would be sorry to annoy me'" (WD, 145). Her selfishness is constantly masked as sacrifice for others. Molly's invitation to Hamley Hall after Cynthia's marriage comes at a time that happens to be convenient for Mrs. Gibson to let her go. Mrs. Gibson alludes to the practical considerations in allowing Molly to accept the invitation, but she insists that "'I am always so unwilling to put any obstacles in the way of any one's pleasure,'" and "'I will waive my own wish for your companionship and plead your cause with papa'" (WD, 725). Her artificial pose as a nurturer does not permit her to acknowledge that she ever satisfies her own desires, but only those of her family. Through her characterization of Mrs. Gibson, Mrs. Gaskell subtly parodies the convention of the saintly, self-sacrificing Victorian mother.

Mrs. Gibson's essential lack of sympathy is most clearly exposed by her aversion to illness in others. The truly nurturant woman is a dedicated nurse whenever her sick-bed services are required. Like Sylvia Robson, Ruth Hilton, Margaret Hale, and Molly Gibson, she devotes herself to the care of friends, relatives, and even strangers who need her loving skill. Mrs. Gibson, by contrast, is wholly unsympathetic to the infirmities of anyone but herself. She claims to have nursed her first husband, Mr. Kirkpatrick, during his fatal consumption, and Mrs. Gaskell does not contradict her. However, given Mrs. Gibson's present attitude toward sickness, Mr. Kirkpatrick may have died in self-defense. Hyacinth reacts to illness with perfunctory solicitude that scarcely conceals her true impatience. When Molly returns from the Hall where Mrs. Hamley lies dying, Mrs. Gibson remarks, "'What a time she lingers! It must be very wearying work to them all,'" and advises Molly, "'You're no relation, so you need not feel it so much'" (WD, 228). Jealous of her husband's patients, she takes an interest in his work only when it interferes with her own plans. The doctor's wife betrays a strong antipathy to illness that accords completely with the rest of her character. Unsympathetic and selfish, impatient with weakness in others and unperceptive of their needs, she nurtures people only when it may be to her advantage to do so. Since invalids can offer little compensation for her efforts, caring for the sick is seldom worth her while.

Both Mrs. Gibson and her daughter Cynthia Kirkpatrick may be considered non-nurturing women, in that they fail to take care of other people with loving and disinterested altruism. Molly Gibson and Mrs. Hamley, on the other hand, are nurturers: sympathetic, gentle, suppressing their own desires to give happiness to others, and seeking any small means of contributing to the harmony of the home. Molly is morally stronger than Cynthia, and Mrs. Hamley is more admirable than Mrs. Gibson, but it must be questioned whether the nurturant women in Wives and Daughters are happier or more successful than the non-nurturers. In the earlier novels, the question seldom arises because virtually all the female characters nurture someone. The occasional hard-hearted woman, like Mrs. Browne in "The Moorland Cottage," ends her life in bitter misery, and there is no doubt that it is preferable to care for others instead of for oneself alone. In Wives and Daughters, however, Mrs. Gaskell allows Hyacinth and her daughter to care principally for themselves and to survive. Indeed, because they are chiefly concerned with their own comfort and happiness, they both attain their ambitions more readily than do either Molly or Mrs. Hamley. As the subtitle of the novel indicates, Wives and Daughters is "an everyday story," and Mrs. Gaskell recognized that life seldom rewards the nurturing woman in tangible ways. Molly's only recompense is the love and loyalty of her father, the Squire, Aimée, and Roger, just as Mrs. Hamley's reward is her family's devotion.

If Cynthia and Mrs. Gibson appear to manage as well as or better than the nurturing women, it is evidence of Mrs. Gaskell's increasing subtlety as a writer. Without overt moralizing, she indicates that Mrs. Gibson is unhappy in her marriage as a result of her selfishness. Motivated by a worldly desire for prestige, Mrs. Gibson urges Osborne Hamley upon her daughter, until she overhears the doctor's suspicions of Osborne's illness and transfers her ambitions to the second son, Roger. Mr. Gibson is appalled by her dishonourable conduct and coldly calculating arrangements and loses all respect for his wife. She cannot understand his higher moral code any more than she can tease him into good humour. Despite her affinity for "smooth ways and pleasant quietness," she cannot please her husband, but instead goes on "groping about to find the means of reinstating herself in his good graces." Sympathetic Molly, recognizing her stepmother's unhappiness, is "often compelled to pity her in spite of herself" (WD, 477). At the end of the novel, Mrs. Gibson has her newly-renovated house, her three servants, and her shawl from Calais, but she does not have the love and respect of her family and neighbours. Cynthia, too, departs from the stage rich in material possessions but lacking the good opinion of those she most esteems--Mr. Gibson, Molly, and Roger. Yet Cynthia and Mrs. Gibson are never condemned, nor are Molly and Mrs. Hamley portrayed as saints. Instead of judging the nurturing and non-nurturing women as she does in "The Moorland Cottage," Mrs. Gaskell presents them fairly and leaves the judgment to the reader.

One feminist critic of Wives and Daughters argues that this book, like other nineteenth-century novels, offers women no positive alternative to "giving up one's life to the service of others.' Spacks notes that Molly "occupies herself by 'taking care' of others, and wishes only for something of her own to take care of; but we are enabled to ask whether this must be all there is, whether it is in any sense enough."[16] According to Mrs. Gaskell, the nurturing role is the woman's responsibility whether or not it affords her personal fulfilment. A woman may accomplish great works elsewhere, but she must be responsive to her family's needs as well. Mrs. Gaskell herself appears to have found her greatest satisfaction in caring for her family, yet she was a successful and prolific writer in addition to being a compassionate wife and mother. As Wives and Daughters indicates, the nurturing and self-sacrificing woman does not necessarily find her reward in this life, but the role is nonetheless her responsibility. Although it may not be "in any sense enough," Mrs. Gaskell presents the task of nurturing as one of the duties of wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters.

Like Mrs. Gaskell herself, the good women in her novels and stories define themselves primarily by their nurturant qualities. Their compassionate love finds an outlet in sympathetic listening, kind and quiet deeds, and tireless care for the sick. Women who fulfill their natural duties, like Molly Gibson and Maggie Browne, attain some degree of love and admiration from family, friends, neighbours, and strangers. Like Mrs. Buxton and Mrs. Hamley, they may carry their self-suppression to the point of death, but such a death is viewed as noble and sanctified. On the other hand, women who refuse to nurture are portrayed as selfish, lacking in empathy, and having little capacity for love. Mrs. Gibson and Cynthia Kirkpatrick attempt to please themselves rather than other people and succeed in antagonizing those whose respect they covet. In Wives and Daughters, Mrs. Gaskell is too skilful to insist upon her moral, but her subtle clues throughout the book weigh the scales in favour of the nurturing women. Through the use of contrasting characters, she presents a detailed and artful analysis of the nurturing qualities that comprise the third duty of wives, sisters, daughters, and mothers who would preserve a happy home.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Like the wise women in her novels and short stories, Mrs. Gaskell devoted a major portion of her talents and energies to her domestic duties. Aware from childhood of the fragility of the home, she sought to maintain a stable family life by giving primacy to the needs of her husband and daughters. As a creative and intelligent woman, however, she occasionally experienced conflict between their needs and her own.

In a letter to her close friend Eliza (Tottie) Fox in 1850, Mrs. Gaskell confesses that she has many "selves" warring within her: "One of my mes [sic] is, I do believe, a true Christian..., another of my mes is a wife and mother. Then again, I've another self with full taste for beauty and convenience..." (Letters, 108). She and Tottie, a painter, recognized the incompatibility of an artistic life and a woman's domestic responsibilities. Although creative women may "have the refuge of the hidden world of Art to shelter themselves in when too much pressed upon by...peddling cares" (Letters, 106), their true calling lies within the family. Mrs. Gaskell is uncompromising on this point: "One thing is pretty clear, women must give up living an artist's life if home duties are to to be paramount. It is different with men, whose home duties are so small a part of their life" (Letters, 106). A woman's work as a child-raiser, peacemaker, and nurturer--the roles Mrs. Gaskell examines in her books--is to be her chief work in life, "what we have to do in advancing the Kingdom of God" (Letters, 107).

The women in the fiction of Mrs. Gaskell have many "mes" as well, but the domestic self predominates in all of her characters. Among Mrs. Gaskell's heroines, the few who have artistic or intellectual gifts subordinate them to their home duties. For example, Mary's friend Margaret Jennings in Mary Barton is an accomplished singer, but she uses her talents only when she grows too blind for her real work as a seamstress, and whether sewing or singing, she works for the sake of her grandfather. The brilliant Phillis Holman of "Cousin Phillis" is as skilful at household chores as she is at Latin and Greek, and she studies Dante as she peels apples for the Sunday pie. The women in Mrs. Gaskell's fiction all have their "appointed work to do, which no one else can do so well" (Letters, 107), and it is invariably the work of the home.

As characters like Hyacinth Gibson demonstrate, however, it is not enough for a woman merely to act out her domestic role. She must dedicate herself to the well-being of her family, sacrificing personal desire and ambition in order to advance the good of all. "If Self is to be the end of exertion," Mrs. Gaskell tells Tottie, "those exertions are unholy, there is no doubt of that" (Letters, 106-107). Thus the ideal woman, according to Mrs. Gaskell, is the wife, mother, sister, or daughter who fulfills her home duties out of altruistic love and who treats these responsibilities as her vocation. She may refresh herself with occasional peeps into "the hidden world of Art," but like the Soul in Tennyson's "The Palace of Art,"[1] she cannot make it her abode.

The prototypic "wise woman" of Mrs. Gaskell's imagination may be Margaret Hale of North and South. Forthright and intelligent, Margaret undertakes her tasks with a sense of mission and performs her duties cheerfully and unselfishly. She keeps the home intact through crises, nurtures and nurses both parents, devotes herself to children and the poor, and concludes by marrying an equally intelligent and forthright mill-owner who doubtlessly will provide her with a family of her own to care for. By contrast, the foolish woman neglects or abuses her duties and undermines the structure of the home. Sometimes her failure leads directly to the collapse of family life: for example, in Sylvia's Lovers, Sylvia's refusal to make peace drives her husband into exile. More often, a woman's folly destroys the family in subtle ways: Mrs. Gibson in Wives and Daughters disrupts a peaceful home with manipulation and selfishness. As child-raisers, peacemakers, and nurturers, the female characters in Mrs. Gaskell's works reveal their essential foolishness or wisdom.

Successful child-raisers, as Mrs. Gaskell indicates, need not be the natural parents of the child; indeed, the most admirable parents in her books are often adoptive mothers like Mrs. Buxton in "The Moorland Cottage," who cares for her niece. Every child-raiser, whether natural or adoptive, has responsibility for the child's moral and secular education, and she teaches the child by her own example and with many prayers and tears. Ruth Hilton in Ruth epitomizes Mrs. Gaskell's saintly child-raiser. Despite her son's illegitimacy, Ruth strives to be respectable and righteous so that she may be a fitting example for little Leonard. She sews his clothes, learns Latin for his sake, nurses him day and night, and endures the condemnation of the town when the facts of his birth are disclosed. With the help of two other good child-raisers in the novel, Faith Benson and the servant Sally, Ruth brings up her son as a model of Christian manhood.

The peacemakers in Mrs. Gaskell's stories have an equally demanding task, even though their work is less conspicuous than that of the child-raisers. Because the home is by its very nature fragile, peacemaking women have the responsibility of soothing its occupants and reducing tension between individuals. Mrs. Hamley of Wives and Daughters is praised for her ability to set her fractious husband "at peace with himself when in her presence" (WD, 284), and the Squire and his sons feel keenly the want of her "pleasant influence" after her death. An empathetic, patient conciliator like Bell Robson in Sylvia's Lovers appears to have approximated her creator's ideal of wifehood. Sylvia's Lovers, however, is not so much an exposition of the model peacemaker as a lesson on the value of conciliation. Sylvia learns slowly and painfully that her stubborn refusal to forgive her husband is at the root of her failed marriage and her spoiled life. She gives and receives the needed pardon, but only as her husband is dying in her arms.

Like child-raising and peacemaking, the third duty of nurturing can mean the salvation or the ruin of the home. A good nurturer sacrifices herself on the altar of family life, suppressing her own needs in order to minister to the desires of everyone else. Whether she is nursing the poor, running errands, lending a sympathetic ear, or "embroidering a small piece of cambric for some little article of dress" (NS, 111) for a cousin's baby, she immerses herself in her duties. Wives and Daughters presents a close study of two women who are devoted nurturers and two who reject the ideal of a life of service. Although the nurturing Molly Gibson and Mrs. Hamley are praised for their self-sacrifice, Mrs. Gibson and Cynthia Kirkpatrick achieve worldly success despite their failure to care for others. Mrs. Gaskell's increased maturity as a writer permitted her to develop complex characters like Cynthia and Hyacinth, who fall short of the standard of womanhood and yet are neither judged nor condemned.

Wives and Daughters marks the apex of Mrs. Gaskell's literary development, and in particular the height of her ability to depict women in their domestic roles. In the early novels and stories, the roles of women tend to be idealized. Wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters are generally wise, strong, nurturing women mindful only of the family's good. The mother in "Lizzie Leigh," for example, is a righteous woman who lives in "the most complete confidence and loving submission"[2] to her husband. When he forbids her to seek out their wayward daughter, she chafes at the restriction but does not disobey. He finally relents on his deathbed, and Mrs. Leigh immediately lets the farm and moves to Manchester to find Lizzie. Night after night, the old mother searches the streets, certain her daughter is alive because "'I've prayed and prayed just once again to see her sweet face, and tell her I've forgiven her, though she's broken my heart.'"[3] When she does find her daughter, now a hardened prostitute, she tells her, "'I'm thy mother, darling; don't be afeard of me. I never left off loving thee, Lizzie.'"[4] As a child-raiser, Mrs. Leigh is a one-dimensional figure, a frame upon which Mrs. Gaskell drapes the ideal attributes of motherhood. She is the stereotypic mother of Victorian fiction, conventional and unconvincing.

Susan Palmer in the same story, the schoolteacher who adopts Lizzie's illegitimate child, is another paragon of nurturing and child-raising skills: "'She's just the one to come quietly in, and do the very thing most wanted;'" "Susan is the bright one who brings sunshine to all. Children grow around her and call her blessed."[5] In this early story, these idealized women are inseparable from the roles they fill. Susan has no character apart from her household and neighbourhood tasks, and Mrs. Leigh is identified solely as a wife and mother.

Mrs. Gaskell's later works, such as "Cousin Phillis," grant greater individuality to women within their domestic roles. Phillis' mother is portrayed as a woman no less devoted to her home than Mrs. Leigh, yet she appears more credible to the reader. Instead of being in perfect harmony with her family, endlessly forbearing and forgiving, the narrator observes that

> ...she was completely unable even to understand the pleasure her husband and daughter took in intellectual pursuits, much less to care in the least herself for the pursuits themselves, and was thus unavoidably thrown out of some of their interests. I had once or twice thought she was a little jealous of her own child, as a fitter companion for her husband than she was herself... . 6

Such deft touches of character lift Cousin Holman out of the stereotype that her role as a mother and wife tends to impose. Phillis Holman, as another of Mrs. Gaskell's "ideal daughter," is also an advancement over the cheerful, neat-handed girls of the earlier stories, such as Susan Palmer and Libbie Marsh. Phillis is grave and studious, completely lacks a sense of humour, and is "always too much engrossed with any matter in hand to think about other people's manners and looks."[7] Neither Phillis nor her mother is a wholly conventional woman, and both represent the progression toward subtlety and realism in Mrs. Gaskell's books.

In spite of the evident progression of her work over the eighteen years of her writing career, Mrs. Gaskell's artistic growth may have been hampered by her preoccupation with themes of home and family. Again and again, she examines favorite motifs drawn from her own experiences as a daughter, sister, mother, and wife: the orphaned girl, the foster parent, the sailor-brother lost on a voyage, the infant dying in its mother's arms, the woman soothing a querulous husband. If her treatment of family themes advanced in sophistication over the years and her characters became more complex and intellectually satisfying, her vision always remained focused on the home. Had she broadened her scope in certain directions suggested by her novels, she might have been a more powerful novelist, and one whose work was more enduring.

For example, her sympathetic portrayals of factory workers in Mary Barton and North and South, although secondary to her main concerns of domestic life, might have been developed into definitive studies of the industrial era. Nothing in Kingsley's Alton Locke or Dickens' Hard Times approaches, for intensity or truthfulness, this passage from Mary Barton, which describes a working-man's slow death from poverty and fever:

> He lay on straw, so damp and mouldy, no dog would have chosen it in preference to flags; over it was a piece of sacking, coming next to his worn skeleton of a body; above him was mustered every article of clothing that could be spared by mother and children in this bitter weather; and in addition to his own, these might have given as much warmth as one blanket, could they have been kept on him; but, as he restlessly tossed to and fro, they fell off and left him shivering in spite of the burning heat of his skin...(MB, 68).

Then again, Mrs. Gaskell might have turned her talents toward historical novels, as Sylvia's Lovers indicates that she was amply qualified to do. Her descriptions of the press-gang are among the best passages of the novel. Yet again, these incidents are subordinate to her primary themes of home and family. In Ruth, she shows herself willing to examine controversial topics, but she forces an abrupt ending on the story: instead of allowing Ruth's redemption by good works, she bows to orthodox morality and insists that the girl die to exculpate her sin. Although her novels hint at moral, historical, and political disputes, Mrs. Gaskell is too conventional a writer to explore them fully.

Her conventionality may, indeed,be at the root of her continual presentation of domestic themes. Immersed in her own household cares and continually striving to raise her daughters, keep peace in the home, and nurture her own family, she naturally drew upon her immediate concerns in writing her novels. Although she was capable of treating intellectual and philosophical themes in a competent manner, she chose to confine herself, for the most part, to the sphere she knew best: the home and family. If her perception of the woman's role is limited by her subject matter and her era, Mrs. Gaskell nonetheless provides an honest, sympathetic, and intelligent portrait of several classes of mid-Victorian women. Moreover, her books and stories present a clear and increasingly artistic elucidation of the roles that women can and must adopt.

Throughout her novels and short stories, Mrs. Gaskell expresses her own strong commitment to the survival of the family. This survival, as she affirms from her first story, "Libbie Marsh's Three Eras," to her last, Wives and Daughters, is dependent upon the women of the home. If women grant priority to their natural duties as child-raisers, peacemakers, and nurturers, and perform their roles with sincerity and devotion, then they will be rewarded by having stable, loving homes. Her books exhibit a development from one-dimensional women who are defined by their roles to complex, vigorous characters who fulfill the same roles with individuality and style.

Although Wives and Daughters appears to reject the axiom that the wise woman will be rewarded, it actually reiterates the premise with greater subtlety than the earlier books do. Wise women like Molly Gibson, who build up their homes by assuming their appointed duties, will receive as their prize the love and respect of their family and friends. A foolish woman like Mrs. Gibson, who tears down her house with her own hands, will end in dissatisfaction and unhappiness, even if she does not literally destroy her home. To Mrs. Gaskell, who believed that for a woman "home duties are to be paramount," there was no greater tragedy than the destruction of a family, and no greater joy than the preservation of the home by a wise and loving woman.

NOTES

CHAPTER ONE

[1] Quoted by Gerald DeWitt Sanders, *Elizabeth Gaskell* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1929, rpt. Russell and Russell, 1971), p. 142.

[2] Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Alan Shelston (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1975), p. 334.

[3] Gaskell, *My Diary: The Early Years of my Daughter Marianne* (London: Privately printed by Clement Shorter, 1923), as quoted by Annette B. Hopkins, *Elizabeth Gaskell: Her Life and Work* (London: John Lehmann, 1952), p. 61.

[4] Letter to Elizabeth Gaskell (sister-in-law), 18 March 1837, no. 5, in *The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell*, ed. J.A.V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966), p. 9.

[5] Gaskell, "The Moorland Cottage," in *The Works of Mrs. Gaskell: The Knutsford Edition*, introd. A.W. Ward (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1906), II, pp. 267-383.

[6] Winifred Gérin, *Elizabeth Gaskell: A Biography* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 17.

[7] John McVeagh, *Elizabeth Gaskell* (New York: Humanities Press, 1970), p. 6.

[8] Edgar Wright, *Mrs. Gaskell: The Basis for Reassessment* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 17.

[9] Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, p. 334.

[10] W.A. Craik, *Elizabeth Gaskell and the English Provincial Novel* (London: Methuen and Co., 1975), p. 239.

[11] Wright, p. 58.

[12] Craik, p. 95.

[13] Gaskell, "Bessy's Troubles at Home," in *Works*, III, p. 520.

CHAPTER TWO

[1] Aina Rubenius, *The Woman Question in Mrs. Gaskell's Life and Works* (Sweden: Uppsala, 1973), p. 123.

[2] Arthur Pollard, *Mrs. Gaskell: Novelist and Biographer* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1965), p. 238.

[3] Gaskell, "Cousin Phillis," in *Works*, VII, p. 10.

[4] Françoise Basch, *Relative Creatures: Victorian Women in Society and the Novel*, trans. Anthony Rudolf (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), p. 66.

[5] Gaskell, *My Diary*, as quoted by John Geoffry Sharps, *Mrs. Gaskell's Observation and Invention* (Sussex: Linden Press, 1970), p. 18.

[6] George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. Gordon S. Haight (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1956), p. 357.

[7] Anthony Trollope, *Barchester Towers*, introd. Harlan Hatcher (New York: Random House, 1950), p. 344.

[8] Rubenius, p. 198, n. 2.

[9] Gérin, p. 154.

[10] Pollard, p. 197.

[11] Gaskell, "The Crooked Branch," in *Works*, VII, p. 212.

[12] Pollard, p. 241.

[13] Gaskell, "Libbie Marsh's Three Eras," in *Works*, I, p. 448.

[14] Gaskell, "The Well of Pen-Morfa," in *Works*, II, p. 266.

[15] Gaskell, "The Well of Pen-Morfa," in *Works*, II, p. 266.

CHAPTER THREE

[1] Rubenius, p. 69.

[2] Gérin, p. 224.

[3] Wright, p. 53.

[4] Hopkins, p. 325.

[5] George Eliot, "Letter to Mrs. Peter Alfred Taylor," in The George Eliot Letters, ed. Gordon S. Haight (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), II, p. 86.

[6] Patricia Meyer Spacks, "Taking Care: Some Women Novelists," Novel,VI (1972), 38.

[7] Pollard, p. 219.

[8] Pollard, p. 215.

CHAPTER FOUR

[1] Gérin, p. 304.

[2] Gaskell, "Mr. Harrison's Confessions," in Works, V, pp. 415, 453.

[3] Gaskell, "Bessy's Troubles at Home," in Works, III, p. 532.

[4] Gaskell, "Bessy's Troubles at Home," in Works, III, p. 535.

[5] Gaskell, "Cousin Phillis," in Works, VII, p. 78.

[6] Nancy D. Mann, "Intelligence and Self-Awareness in North and South: A Matter of Sex and Class," Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature,XXIX (1975), 24, 27.

[7] Mann, 29.

[8] Gaskell, "Morton Hall," in Works, II, p. 467.

[9] Gaskell, "The Moorland Cottage," in Works, II, p. 273.

[10] Gaskell, "The Moorland Cottage," p. 362.

[11] Gaskell, "The Moorland Cottage," pp. 353, 354.

[12] Gaskell, "The Moorland Cottage," pp. 382-83.

[13] Spacks, p. 40.

[14] Craik, p. 128.

[15] Craik, p. 238.

[16] Spacks, pp. 40, 41.

CHAPTER FIVE

[1] Alfred Tennyson, "The Palace of Art, in The Poems of Tennyson, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Longman, 1969), pp. 400-418.

[2] Gaskell, "Lizzie Leigh," in Works, II, p. 206.

[3] Gaskell, "Lizzie Leigh," p. 212.

[4] Gaskell, "Lizzie Leigh," p. 239.

[5] Gaskell, "Lizzie Leigh," pp. 221, 241.

[6] Gaskell, "Cousin Phillis," in Works, VII, p. 35.

[7] Gaskell, "Cousin Phillis," p. 35.

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